



MADISON SOS

THE YOUNG WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP FORUM

empowering teen girls through community leadership and activism

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TEEN-LED PROJECT UNVEILS EXCITING NEW INITIATIVES

MADISON—**Madison SOS** (*Speak Out, Sister!*), the initiative to engage high school teen girls in community leadership founded this spring by high school junior **Natalia Thompson**, recently announced plans for several new initiatives to connect teens as grassroots leaders on local issues.

Voices of Courage



Thompson made the announcement at **Voices of Courage**, a community forum on women and politics hosted by Madison SOS on November 15 at the Monona Terrace. The forum was the culminating event of an eight week-long pilot program to train high school teen girls as community leaders and activists.



Voices of Courage, which featured a keynote by Peg Lautenschlager and a panel discussion on women and politics (including Linda Honold, Director of Citizen Action of Wisconsin; State Rep. Sony Pope-Roberts; Lucía Nuñez, Director of the Department of Civil Rights; Renee Moe, VP of United Way of Dane County; and Ruth Conniff, Political Editor of *The Progressive*; and moderator Jenny Price of *Madison Magazine*), was a great success. In her remarks, Thompson noted the inspiring speakers and high participation among young women of color.



Thompson prefaced the unveiling of the initiatives by announcing the program's strong performance in a current nationwide grant competition. Madison SOS was recently named to the Top 100 list of the Case Foundation's **Make It Your Own Awards**.

[www.casefoundation.org/make-it-your-own/awards] Almost 5,000 community initiatives applied for the high-stakes grants, which will provide \$10,000 to twenty promising "citizen-centered" civic engagement projects in February 2008.

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Current plans for upcoming initiatives (whose impact and sustainability will depend on funding from the Case Foundation and other sources) include the following:

- **December:** Madison SOS will launch a **blog** for girls from across Madison to submit writing and art on local issues, both personal and political, and to engage in online discussion on the issues that most matter to them.
- **January:** Meetings will begin for the **Teen Leadership Council (TLC)**, the first citywide teen-led task force on issues affecting high school teen girls. The TLC will become the primary leadership organization of Madison SOS.
- **February-April:** Madison SOS will hold listening sessions and focus groups, as well as conduct surveys and personal interviews, to create a **status report** on the issues facing high school teen girls – and their hopes for the future of their community (to be published in August). The report will include teen-written recommendations for community leaders in six focus areas.
- **May-August:** Under the direction of local muralist Sheba McCants, Madison SOS teen artists will create a **community mural** depicting their vision for the future of their city.

In addition to these plans, Madison SOS hopes to launch an online forum for action-oriented young women by the spring of 2009 – an Internet-based social change network that will provide resources, action ideas, and discussion boards on local issues. Finally, the organization plans to continue offering its trainings on leadership and community activism, as well as establish satellite organizations at local high schools.



Madison SOS teen leaders at the State Capitol in Nov.

“This is an intensely exciting time for us,” Thompson says. “We’ve had a great response to our fall pilot program. As one workshop participant told us, ‘Madison SOS gives me hope for the world.’” Madison SOS has also earned accolades from distinguished leaders, such as Lt. Governor Barbara Lawton, who wrote of the youth-led project:

[Natalia Thompson] has come forward with a bold plan, the confidence to launch it, and an extraordinary level of competence to advance it. This young woman is the kind of savvy leader we want to learn from and “clone” across the nation. Natalia’s smart advocacy for young women’s rights wisely focuses on empowering them through civic engagement and political leadership. I believe that with Madison SOS, Natalia is creating a model to put girls in the lead of improving their status and, with it, her grassroots, citizen-led vehicle engages the imagination and will of the larger community to do its part to address issues facing teen girls.

Thompson adds: “Now is the time to bring young women to the forefront of community leadership. Across the country, girls’ leadership is gaining recognition as a powerful tool for social change [see *Exploring Girls’ Leadership*, a report published this month by the Girl Scout Research Institute: www.girlscouts.org/research/publications/reviews/exploring_leadership.asp]. It’s time to expand these exciting—and vital—efforts.”

Madison SOS is sponsored by the Girl Scouts of Black Hawk Council, YWCA of Madison, Girl Neighborhood Power, the Wisconsin Women’s Network, ACLU of Wisconsin, and the Planned Parenthood Advocates of Wisconsin