



## CASE STUDY: The power of youth advocacy in the United States and the Philippines

Youth themselves are often the most powerful advocates in the fight against abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence. Below are two examples from ChildFund programs in the **United States of America (USA)** and the **Philippines**, where youth have stood up for their rights and advocated for change.

In the **USA**, nine Youth Ambassadors from the *Youth Civic Engagement and Leadership (YCEL)* project in Jackson, Mississippi, traveled to Washington, D.C., to participate in ChildFund's annual Advocacy Day on March 24, 2017.<sup>xxx</sup> Joining our staff from across the organization, these young people discussed critical issues facing children and youth with members of Congress, including investment in education and putting an end to violence.

Advocacy Day provided the Youth Ambassadors with an opportunity to use the leadership and advocacy skills they had learned through the *YCEL* project. Hailing from communities characterized by poverty and violence, they had the rare opportunity to experience being listened to by people in power, which helped the young people understand that they could actually make a difference.

The Youth Ambassadors' involvement in Advocacy Day represented a true youth-adult partnership with youth and adults working together as colleagues for a common cause. The experience demonstrated the power of equipping youth with skills, building their confidence, and providing them with opportunities to bring their passion and energy to advocate for change.

**"I want to advocate on behalf of children everywhere, not just children in Jackson [Mississippi]. I feel that people everywhere should have the same basic rights."**

– Youth Ambassador

**"As a recipient and witness of child abuse in the adoption system in the adoption system, [I feel that] what ChildFund is doing could be an example and should definitely be continued because it shows us that children definitely matter and should be protected and cared for."**

– Youth Ambassador

Since returning to Jackson, these young people have built on this momentum and have successfully advocated to bring a youth voice to their school boards so that they can weigh in on issues that matter to them.

As part of the *EMBRACE* project<sup>5</sup> in the **Philippines**, ChildFund has worked to empower children and youth with disabilities to protect themselves and to take action on matters that affect them.<sup>xxxi</sup> A milestone in this initiative was the 2016 **#WeAreIncluded Convention**, organized by ChildFund in Bacolod City. This provided children and youth with disabilities an opportunity to voice concerns about their lack of social inclusion and their vulnerability to violence, in the presence of government, media, and civil society actors.

This Convention culminated in a call to action: children and youth presented the **#WeAreIncluded Manifesto** outlining their demands to be protected from physical abuse and neglect. They demanded appropriate social services and claimed their right to the same opportunities as children and youth without disabilities. In response, participating government agencies and civil society actors committed to an agenda for action and to developing programs and specialist support services.

"All of us share the same feelings of being left out, ignored, neglected, picked on, laughed at and bullied and not being provided the same opportunities as other children and youth without disabilities at home, in the community and at school...we are now coming together to speak out, be heard and advocate for change..."

-Extract from the **#WeAreIncluded Manifesto** written by 57 children and youth with disabilities.

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