



# ADVOCATES FOR YOUTH

Mission, Vision, Niche, and Goals

## Strategic Plan

APRIL 2015 THROUGH MARCH 2020

# OUR STRATEGIC GOALS

**Shifting  
Cultural  
Paradigms**



**Promoting  
Evidence-  
Informed and  
Rights-Based  
Policies and  
Practices**



**Engaging and  
Empowering  
Youth as  
Activists and  
Leaders**



**Promoting  
Sexual Health  
Equity**



**Improving  
the Health of  
Youth in the  
Global South**



## VISION AND VALUES

Advocates for Youth envisions a society in which *all* young people are valued, respected, and treated with dignity; sexuality is accepted as a healthy part of being human; and youth sexual development is recognized as normal. In such a world, all youth and young adults would be celebrated for who they are and provided with the economic, educational, and social opportunities to reach their full potential. Society would recognize young people's rights to honest sexual health education and provide confidential and affordable access to culturally appropriate, youth-friendly sexual health education and services, so that all young people would have the opportunity to lead sexually healthy lives and to become sexually healthy adults.

*Advocates' vision is informed by its core values of Rights. Respect. Responsibility.*

Advocates believes that:

- Youth have the inalienable *right* to honest sexual health information; confidential, consensual sexual health services; and equitable opportunities to reach their full potential.
- Youth deserve *respect*. Valuing young people means authentically involving them in the design, implementation, and evaluation of programs and policies that affect their health and well-being.
- Society has the *responsibility* to provide young people with all of the tools they need to safeguard their sexual health, and young people have the responsibility to protect themselves.

# MISSION STATEMENT

TO BRING THIS VISION TO FRUITION:

*Advocates for Youth partners with youth leaders, adult allies, and youth-serving organizations to advocate for policies and champion programs that recognize young people's rights to: honest sexual health information; accessible, confidential, and affordable sexual health services; and the resources and opportunities necessary to create sexual health equity for all youth.*

## UNIQUE FOCUS

Advocates is one of the few organizations working both in the U.S. and in the global south with a sole focus on youth sexual health and rights. The organization takes an intersectional approach recognizing the connections between sexual health promotion and economic, educational, and social opportunity. Advocates uniquely sits at the nexus of the sexual health, rights, and justice fields, often serving as a bridge between them and always advocating unapologetically for the sexual health and rights of young people.

Advocates believes it can best serve the field, and ultimately have the largest impact on improving youth sexual health and rights, by working in partnership with youth and their

adult allies, including youth-serving institutions, to shift the cultural paradigm in which we live from one that too often stigmatizes youth and youth sexual development to one that embraces youth as partners and recognizes sexuality as normal and healthy.

Advocates recognizes that poverty, homophobia, transphobia, ageism, racism, and sexism fuel sexual health disparities. The organization seeks to redress these social determinants by working in coalition with economic and social justice organizations and by engaging, empowering, and mobilizing young people from marginalized communities to serve as activists and leaders in the field of sexual health.

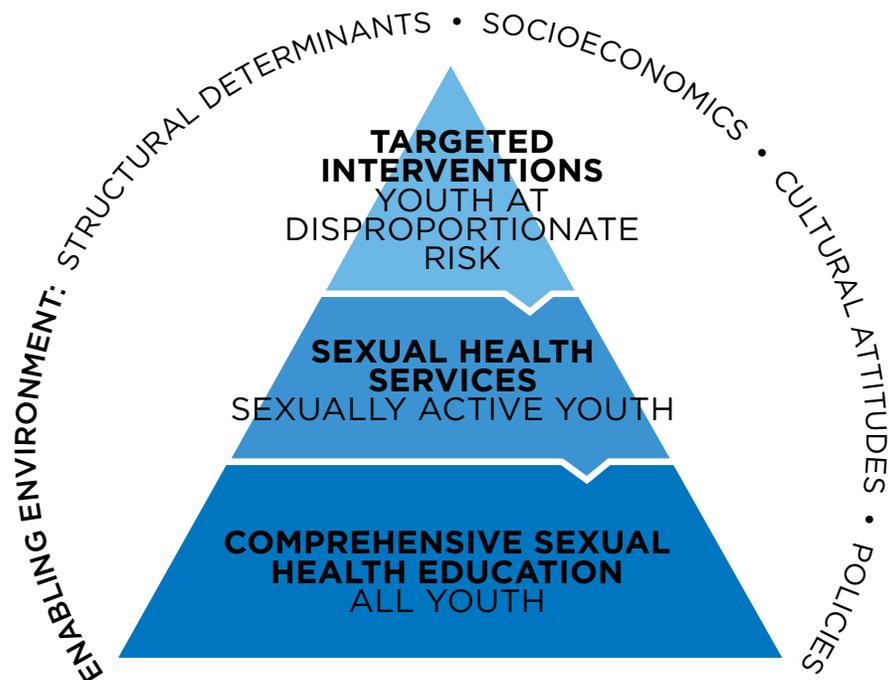
Advocates' Youth Activist Network, currently 75,000 strong on 1,200 campuses and in hundreds of communities in the U.S. and more than 120 countries around the world, is core to the organization's niche and brand.

Advocates' role in the next five years will be to further nurture and support this pipeline of diverse youth leaders and to partner with them and their adult allies to boldly advocate for changes in the cultural and political environment and to champion program strategies that improve youth sexual health. To that end, Advocates also will work to build the capacity of youth-serving professionals to implement evidence- and rights-based sexual health strategies and to engage young people as partners in their work.

**RESOURCEFUL**  
**BOLD · INNOVATIVE**  
**EVIDENCE-INFORMED**  
**RIGHTS-BASED**  
**AUTHENTIC**  
**TRANSPARENT**

### BRAND

Advocates is: **resourceful, bold, and innovative**. The organization promotes strategies that are both evidence-informed *and* rights-based and strives to build the capacity of the sexual and reproductive health, rights, and justice field to implement these strategies and to better engage youth and young adults as partners, activists, and leaders. Advocates strives to be an authentic and transparent partner and collaborator and believes that the collective impact of the many can be greater than the sum of the individual organizations' efforts.



Advocates for Youth, 2014

## YOUTH SEXUAL HEALTH PROMOTION: THE BUILDING BLOCKS



Advocates' youth-adult partnership model sits at the cornerstone of its *Rights. Respect. Responsibility.* philosophy. The organization actively nurtures a pipeline of diverse and highly trained young leaders, assisting them to take action and mobilize their peers in support of youth sexual health and rights.

### **ISSUES: THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF YOUTH SEXUAL HEALTH PROMOTION**

Advocates promotes youth sexual health and rights and works to ensure that all young people have access to the building blocks of sexual health. Advocates works to ensure that all youth are provided quality, age-appropriate, comprehensive, and inclusive sexuality education. Staff also works to ensure that as youth enter adolescence they have access to youth-friendly, affordable, consensual, and confidential sexual health services (including family planning/contraception; HIV/STI screening, treatment, and care; and abortion care). And, in recognition that social and economic justice is inextricably linked to sexual health outcomes, Advocates works in coalition to advocate for targeted interventions and resources that ensure equitable educational, economic, and social opportunities for youth at disproportionate risk for sexual health morbidities.

### **ORGANIZATIONAL STRATEGIES**

Advocates employs a number of interconnected strategies including: Cultural Advocacy; Public Policy Advocacy; Grassroots and Youth Mobilization; Traditional and Digital Media Communications; Youth Activism and Youth Leadership; and Capacity-Building Assistance for Youth-Serving Adults to help them implement evidence-informed, rights-based strategies and engage in meaningful youth-adult partnerships.



## ORGANIZATIONAL GOALS

### GOAL I: Shifting Cultural Paradigms

*Advocates will shift the cultural paradigm toward an acceptance of youth sexual development as normal and healthy; and toward the consensus that all young people have the right to live free from discrimination and be provided with all of the information, services, and opportunities they need to live sexually healthy lives.*

**Rationale:** A shift in the cultural paradigm is paramount to the promotion of youth sexual health. Cultural beliefs and attitudes establish the boundaries within which policies and programs must be negotiated. Formidable barriers to youth sexual health promotion include negative feelings about youth sexuality along with widespread ignorance regarding youth sexual development and the common misapprehension that easy access to information and/or services hastens the onset or increases youth sexual activity. In addition, the current cultural paradigm stigmatizes abortion, shames young families to discourage teen pregnancy, and tolerates inequity and discrimination toward LGBTQ youth and youth of color. Many social conservatives are engaged in a high-stakes campaign to promote homophobia and transphobia, stigmatize sexuality and sexual development, and inculcate youth with notions of traditional gender stereotypes with the intent of reversing gains made by the civil, women's, and gay rights movements over the past five decades.

Advocates' philosophy of *Rights.Respect.Responsibility*. grounds its efforts in fighting this aggressive campaign and shifting a dysfunctional sexual health paradigm away from fear, shame, and denial to an acceptance of sexuality as healthy and youth sexual development as normal. In so doing, Advocates seeks to create a society in which all youth and young adults are valued; their rights to honest sexual health information and confidential sexual health services are recognized; and they all are provided the educational, social, and economic opportunities they need to be sexually healthy.

**Strategies:** Advocates conducts cultural advocacy, pointing out hypocrisy, debunking myths, raising the voices of youth themselves through traditional and social media and the creative arts, and mobilizing youth and young adults as activists, educators, and leaders.



## GOAL II: Promoting Evidence-Informed and Rights-Based Policies and Practices

*Advocates will drive youth sexual health policy and practice toward strategies that are both evidence-informed and rights-based.*



**Rationale:** Advocates understands that policies and programs affect the health and well-being of youth and young adults. Policies enable or inhibit youth-serving professionals from offering the programs and services youth need. Yet even the best policy cannot ensure the effective implementation of youth sexual health strategies. Educators, health care professionals, parents/caregivers, and other youth-serving providers often need guidance on best practices in youth sexual health promotion.

Advocates recognizes that these policies and programs must be both evidence-informed and rights-based. The organization champions strategies that promote sexual health and well-being and help youth reduce their risk of unintended pregnancy and/or sexually transmitted infections, while also recognizing their rights to be treated with honesty, dignity, and respect.

**Strategies:** Staff champions evidence-informed and rights-based policies and practices by engaging young people themselves as advocates and educators; educating federal, state, and local policy makers; working in coalition at the national and state levels; and providing youth-serving professionals and their organizations with information, technical assistance, training, and seed funding in areas such as: 1) comprehensive sexuality education; 2) contraceptive access; 3) abortion care; 4) HIV/STI prevention, treatment, and care; and 5) LGBTQ health and rights. Advocates supports and promotes measures that nurture champions and invigorate and mobilize young people to take action.

## GOAL III: Engaging and Empowering Youth as Activists and Leaders

*Advocates will engage young people as partners, activists, educators, and leaders, helping them to mobilize their peers in support of youth sexual health and rights and creating a pipeline of diverse and highly trained young leaders for the sexual health, rights, and justice fields.*

**Rationale:** Advocates recognizes that young people’s voices and perspectives must be central in the fight for young people’s sexual health and rights. Youth have the right to be active partners in developing, shaping, and implementing programs and policies that impact their health and lives. Furthermore, this generation of young people is one of the most progressive and diverse in history. They live in a globalized world and experience social, economic, and health issues as related and interconnected. This at a time when many decision makers—leaders of organizations and government agencies—as well as much of the adult public, remain mired in the policies and practices of the past, often working in silos and failing to understand the diversity of circumstances and the intersectionality with which this generation views itself and its world.

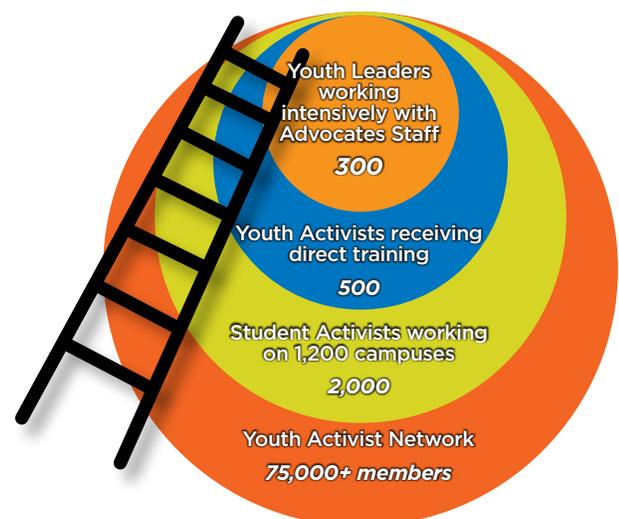
Advocates’ efforts to engage and empower a diverse and highly trained cadre of young people serves as a strategy for achieving political and cultural change. As one of the largest, most progressive and diverse generations, young people are positioned to be leaders in transforming existing policies and programs that stigmatize youth sexuality and limit access to services. They are positioned to speak out and advocate for programs, policies, and a culture that respects and values young people and their right to lead sexually healthy lives. By engaging this generation as leaders rather than simply passive end users of adult programs, Advocates can shape the present as well as the future as this generation propels change in the decades ahead as advocates, educators, policy makers, parents, and community leaders. Furthermore, by encouraging these young activists to become leaders in the field—to take positions within sexual health, rights, and justice organizations—Advocates can change the field itself, helping it to become more relevant to the increasingly diverse population of youth it wishes to serve.

**Strategies:** Mobilizing Advocates’ Youth Activist Network, currently 75,000 strong, on 1,200 campuses and in hundreds of communities in the U.S. and more than 120 countries around the world and then helping them to move up the ladder of engagement is a key strategy in creating change around youth sexual health and reproductive rights.

Advocates for Youth strives to build an active, mobilized, and powerful network of young activists to create change on a local, state, national, and international level. Advocates equips young people with the tools they need to make their voices heard whether they are lobbying for a new state-wide policy in favor of comprehensive sexual health education or expanding the rights of LGBTQ students on their campuses. Youth activists learn different strategies of creating change, from peer education, to political advocacy, to grassroots mobilization, to direct action. Staff supports young people in writing letters to the editor, participating in twitter chats, meeting with their local officials, being interviewed by the media, collecting petitions, and more to ensure their voices and issues get the attention they deserve.

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#### ADVOCATES FOR YOUTH YOUTH ACTIVIST NETWORK LADDER OF ENGAGEMENT



Each year, Advocates coordinates and provides scholarships for approximately 150 young leaders to attend an intensive youth activist training institute. These young people then work intensively with staff, receiving ongoing training, technical assistance, and resources—including seed funding throughout the year to implement action plans on their campuses or in their communities to improve youth sexual health and rights.

## GOAL IV: Promoting Sexual Health Equity

*Advocates will champion sexual health equity, calling attention to the social and structural determinants of sexual health and working to redress sexual health disparities among youth and young adults from marginalized communities, including low-income youth, youth of color, young families, and LGBTQ youth.*

**Rationale:** Public health epidemics, the spread of infection, and the lack of access to health services are not generalized among all populations. Sexual health disparities, including HIV and AIDS, other STIs, and unintended pregnancy most heavily affect low-income and marginalized communities, including LGBTQ youth, young men who have sex with men (YMSM), low-income youth of color, young women living in the global south, and indigenous youth.

Advocates understands that sexual health is inextricably entwined with social, economic, and educational opportunities. Poverty; inequitable resource allocation; lack of access to culturally competent, affordable health care or quality educational opportunities; internalized oppression; and institutionalized homophobia, transphobia, racism, sexism, and gender inequity, all fuel sexual health disparities.

**Strategies:** In Advocates' vision of a better world, all youth and young adults are afforded the opportunities to reach their full potential. To realize this vision, Advocates works to redress sexual health disparities by: educating policy makers, youth-serving professionals, media, and the public about the social determinants; advocating for resource allocation to redress disparities; building the capacity of youth-serving providers to celebrate diversity and to offer culturally relevant and inclusive sexuality education and services; and engaging and empowering young people from marginalized communities to serve as activists and leaders.



**Advocates understands that sexual health is inextricably entwined with social, economic, and educational opportunities.**

## GOAL V: Improving the Health of Youth in the Global South

*Advocates will improve the health and well-being of youth and young adults living in the global south by building the capacity of youth leaders and youth-serving professionals to advocate for and to implement evidence- and rights-based sexual health policies and programs.*

**Rationale:** Today's generation of young people is the largest in global history. Young people living in the global south face significant challenges to their health and well-being, such as unintended pregnancy, unsafe abortion, and STIs including HIV; violence; gender inequality; harmful traditional practices; homophobia; and transphobia. About 90 percent of teen births worldwide occur in low- and middle-income countries and more than 222 million women around the world still have an unmet need for modern, effective contraception. In Africa, complications from pregnancy, childbirth, and lack of safe abortion care are the leading causes of death for young women ages 15-19. Further, approximately 41 percent of all new HIV infections worldwide occur among young people ages 15-24 and most of these occur in the global south, with young women constituting 60 percent of all new infections. Young people in the global south need access to sexual and reproductive health information, services, and supportive environments in order to be able to protect themselves and live healthy lives.

**Strategies:** Advocates is one of the few organizations working to promote the sexual health and rights of all young people, both in the U.S. and in the global south. Advocates works in partnership with local organizations, including youth-led and youth-serving organizations, government and UN agencies, and youth activists in low- and middle-income countries, helping them to advocate for and implement evidence-informed, rights-based policies and practices that advance all young people's sexual and reproductive health and rights, including those at disproportionate risk. Staff provides information, technical assistance, training, and seed funding in areas such as advocacy, community mobilization, youth leadership, peer education, comprehensive sexuality education, gender equality, contraceptive access, HIV/STI prevention, LGBTQ health and rights, parent-child communication, and youth-adult partnerships. Advocates also engages and empowers youth as activists and leaders, helping them to raise their voices within national and international forums to advocate for their sexual health and rights.



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# OUR MISSION AND VISION

Advocates' vision is informed by its core values of *Rights.Respect.Responsibility*. (the 3Rs). Advocates believes that:

- Youth have the inalienable *right* to honest sexual health information; confidential, consensual sexual health services; and equitable opportunities to reach their full potential.
- Youth deserve *respect*. Valuing young people means authentically involving them in the design, implementation, and evaluation of programs and policies that affect their health and well-being.
- Society has the *responsibility* to provide young people with all of the tools they need to safeguard their sexual health, and young people have the responsibility to protect themselves.