



WHY NCCJ?

We can tell you all the reasons why we believe in NCCJ, but don't take *OUR* word for it. In this newsletter we're highlighting stories of a few of our constituents and how NCCJ influenced their lives for the better.

I WENT TO sleep-away camp for the first time when I was 35 years old, and in a way that tells you almost everything you need to know about me. I was a sheltered and quiet only child, an academically-inclined and naïve adolescent who frequently blushed painfully bright red, and an adult who was focused on keeping my role as educator completely separate from my other roles as spouse, daughter, human being.

ALL OF THAT changed for me when I was in my fifth year as an English teacher at Hall High in West Hartford. A colleague, leaving Connecticut for new opportunities elsewhere, approached me about replacing her as Hall's liaison to the NCCJ and advisor to the Action Club. She spent an hour explaining the NCCJ's goals and programs, and invited me to attend an Action club meeting to see what it was really all about. I was flattered to be considered for a program like this, but overwhelmingly was hesitant; I felt like more was being expected of me than I could handle, and that she might have a misperception of me and how I saw my role at school. But I went to that meeting, then participated in one day of NCCJ workshops, and have attended every Action Club meeting and May NCCJ Inter-District ANYTOWN since.

THERE ARE A few moments in our lives after which we are irrevocably changed, and even fewer after which we are irrevocably changed for the better. Saying yes to NCCJ and all it has to offer adults, schools, young people, and communities was one of those moments. I am a better teacher, a better friend, a better spouse, a better family member, a better thinker, and a better citizen because of my connection to NCCJ. And I know that I am not alone in this; NCCJ and their programs have changed so many lives over the years and will undoubtedly do so for years to come. I feel blessed to be a part of that change.



2015 NCCJ CT Inter-District ANYTOWN

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**JEN
LANESE**

Jen is the NCCJ ANYTOWN high school advisor at Hall High school in West Hartford, CT. Thanks to her commitment to her school's community and to excellent instruction in her English classroom, Jen was named West Hartford Teacher of the Year.



DESMOND TATE-ADAMS

Desmond, also known as "Bird," is a 2015 graduate from Windsor High School in CT and has been part of the NCCJ family since his first NCCJ ANYTOWN in 2013.

BEFORE NCCJ ANYTOWN I felt insignificant, unseen and lonely. I often found myself being extremely pessimistic and not caring about much. I spoke infrequently because I felt that anything I had to say did not matter.

I HAVE ATTENDED five NCCJ ANYTOWNS, returning four times as a staff member. I will admit the first time I felt a bit overwhelmed and yet I felt accepted at the same time. I had finally found a place that felt like home, a true community where people became like family after only five days. After my first NCCJ ANYTOWN I joined my school's Action Club, which helped me process my feelings however it did not completely get rid of my negative thoughts and emotions.

That is why I was happy to return as a staff member. Every time I

returned, I was welcomed with open arms and left feeling more confident and more vocal.

BECAUSE OF NCCJ ANYTOWN and their follow up workshops throughout the year, I have gained the motivation to step up and say something when I see injustices. I know how to intervene, when to agree to disagree, and how to help others gain these skills. I am no longer that 16-year-old boy who felt like he did not matter. I now have a voice, know that I matter, and I am better than I could have ever imagined two years ago. I am who I am today because of NCCJ ANYTOWN. NCCJ ANYTOWN is my home; it has showed me it is okay to have feelings, to talk about them and to cry about them, even though society tells us it is not. I hope many others have the opportunity to enjoy this amazing experience that I have been so honored to enjoy numerous times.



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"I could share my story and feel safe, for the first time ever."



TATIANA LOPEZ

Tatiana is a senior at Springfield Central High School in MA. She attended NCCJ ANYTOWN for the first time in October 2014 and is an active member of NCCJ Youth Action Coalition.

I WOULD DESCRIBE my days before NCCJ ANYTOWN as the dark days. I was uneducated about the world and about myself. Looking back I realize I often hid parts of myself and my personality not only because I did not feel accepted by others but also myself. My passion was rooted in gay rights, but that's all I focused on, I was behind the times with all the other social issues.

THEN I ATTENDED NCCJ ANYTOWN. The program for me was a roller coaster ride that I never wanted to get off. I cried, I laughed, I sang, I danced, I learned, I cried some more and of course sang some more. Along the way, finding myself and realizing I was not alone. Everyone there had their own stories and a part of me felt like I could relate to each of them. I could share my story and feel safe, for the first time ever.

NOW, AFTER NCCJ ANYTOWN, I am content. I've noticed that I'm living life without my "cool-card," no longer living up to expectations of others. I found the strength to accept myself. I am aware of all injustices and I try my best to help others see these and become better people. NCCJ ANYTOWN has changed me as a person, changed my lifestyle. For that I am grateful.



Fun at the Hartford Stage