



Democracy in Action: Port Townsend Wisdom Council



In partnership with: Contemporary World Problems Class
ICE Program in Port Townsend School District 50 • PI Program in Chimacum School District 49
and the Center for Wise Democracy

Project Overview

Students in two community high school programs have joined efforts to engage the citizens of Port Townsend WA in a new form of public conversation that builds mutual respect, trust, deeper wisdom and the spirit of community. The "Wisdom Council process" is a social invention that allows the students to convene citizens of the town to collaboratively and creatively address key issues and reach consensus positions. By providing this opportunity for their community, the students will:

- Learn valuable civic engagement and community building tools,
- Experience implementing these tools to advance change on local issues, and
- Bridge the intergenerational gap that too often divides youth from the adults.

This project involves the entire community, deals with issues that people care about, brings youth and elders together, and initiates community building and civic participation that are self-sustaining.

Project Description

In the Wisdom Council process, every couple of months 12 community members are randomly selected to form a Wisdom Council. They meet for a day and a half with a "dynamic facilitator" who helps them dialogue and develop Statements that capture what everyone feels or thinks about issues this group identifies as important. The Statements are then presented back to the community in a ceremony, like a "State of the 'Union'" message. The entire community is then invited to hear and dialogue about the Statements, and to visit informally about them. Over time this process involves most citizens, builds the spirit of community and generates consensus viewpoints.

Local high school students who are enrolled in the class Contemporary World Problems through Individualized Choice Education (I.C.E.) in the Port Townsend School District and PI in the Chimacum School District have chosen to implement three Wisdom Councils for Port Townsend. The dates are November 17-18, 2006, February 2-3, 2007, and April 13-14, 2007. The student conveners and their teacher Marci Van Cleve see the Wisdom Council offering a concrete way to enhance the community spirit of Port Townsend while bridging differing voices and ideas in a meaningful way.



Front Row: Marci Van Cleve (teacher),
Gloria Miles, Jamie Rondeau, Devon
Camey, Lacey Wahl, Jaren Martin

Back Row: Ellie Spitzbart, Hannah
Harvey, Allison Slater, Lonnie
Hoepfner, Andrew Peterson, Nick
Carroll, Ryan King

Not pictured: Chris Wakefield

Impact / Outcomes

The Port Townsend Wisdom Council aims to have the following impact:

- Create a bottom-up or grassroots vision for the community
- Create a stronger sense of community and involvement that is intergenerational
- Improve the quality of talking and thinking about important issues facing the community
- Transform the community from an adversarial, crisis-driven culture to a thoughtful, creative and collaborative culture
- Empower students to be active, concerned and creative members of their community
- Create a model for other communities in youth-led civic engagement in partnership with adults
- Have students learn how to dynamically facilitate meetings and convene Wisdom Councils

About the Center for Wise Democracy

Founded in 2001, the Center for Wise Democracy (CWD) is a nonprofit organization and community of individuals dedicated to creating a new kind of conversation that will involve everyone in solving our most difficult issues. The CWD community builds an inclusive, thoughtful and responsible "We the People" through the use of Dynamic Facilitation and the Wisdom Council. Our community network engages in research and documentation of efforts to use these tools in the public sphere. (www.WiseDemocracy.org)

The project *Democracy in Action: Port Townsend Wisdom Council (PTWC)* is certified with the Center for Wise Democracy, which is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization. All gifts of money, goods and time in support of CWD and PTWC are tax deductible to the fullest extent of federal and Washington State law.

Center for Wise Democracy (CWD)

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Port Townsend Wisdom Council (PTWC)

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