

Young Women's Leadership Program

"SRBWI has helped me by exposing me to things I would have never known if it had not been for the trips we made, the places we visited and the motivational speakers we have had. I liked the strong black women that work with us. Seeing these strong black women really encouraged me and it proved to me that I can be anything I want to be and that sometimes the road will be hard, but you need to keep striving for your goal."

-- YWL participant from Alabama.



Children's Defense Fund

The Young Women's Leadership Program is a component of the Southern Rural Black Women's Initiative for Economic and Social Justice (SRBWI), which seeks to empower women of all ages in impoverished counties in Alabama, Georgia and Mississippi to improve their own and their communities' economic and social well-being.

For each of the past three years, approximately 85 young women and their mentors have attended the five day Unita Blackwell Young Women's Leadership Institute on the campus of Tougaloo College, a historically Black college near Jackson, Mississippi. The 2008 Institute, named for the first African American female mayor in Mississippi, will take place on June 20-24. Participants are in grades 8 to 12 and come from the 77 distressed counties targeted by SRBWI.

While experiencing a slice of college life by staying in the dorms and eating meals on campus, the young women:

- take part in challenging activities designed to nurture leadership abilities.
- are introduced to SRBWI's human rights agenda
- attend interactive workshops in marketable skills
- learn about the rich contributions of southern rural black women to human rights
- discuss problems of African American teenaged girls.

Highlights of past year's Institutes include workshops on fashion design, jewelry making and photography, as well as forums on health and wellness and on how hip hop and media images impact young women's self-image.

A second track, *New Visions*, a digital filmmaking mentor/apprentice program, was added in 2006. The mentors and apprentices engage in highly focused, hands-on training in the production of videos. At night, they participate in the cultural experience of the Institute.

SRBWI employs youth organizers in the three states to continue working with the youth who attended the Institute or applied but weren't chosen because of lack of space. Each state provides ongoing activities that involve Institute participants in regional and state advisory committees, the Mayor's Commissions on Human Rights and community service projects. They also visit college campuses and some participate in CDF's Young Adult Leadership Training (YALTSM) at Haley Farm in Tennessee (www.childrensdefense.org/yalt).

To learn more, join or recommend a young woman for the program, contact Wendy Shenefelt, SRBWI Regional Youth Coordinator wshenefelt@childrensdefense.org or visit www.srbwi.org.

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