
So You Think You Can CON



The DYSC is the District Youth Steering Committee in the Heartland District.

The DYSC is responsible for planning, organizing, and implementing YRUU (Young Religious Unitarian Universalists) conferences for youth between the ages of 14 and 20 years of age.

CON Planning Guide

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First-Time Con-Goers Guide

'What IS this place, and how the heck did I get here?'

Written by: Michael Ohlrogge, District Youth Steering Committee, 2002-2003

Created in: The HUUD. For use: Everywhere!

Chances are you may find yourself asking many of the same questions poor Dorothy did in the Wizard of OZ after being picked up by a tornado and dropped off in some far-off land. The only thing she knew about her strange new surroundings were summed up in the profound statement, ***"It sure ain't Kansas, Toto."***

Hopefully though, with the help of this guide, and the many friendly people around you, YRUU conferences should start seeming very familiar, very fast. Let's start with the basics.

What is YRUU?

YRUU stands for **Young Religious Unitarian Universalists**. It is an organization consisting of youth between the ages of 14 and 20 years of age.

Some of the purposes of YRUU are to:

- Establish a district wide community of youth.
- Provide for worship, celebration, and rites of passage.
- Develop personal growth and leadership skills.
- Develop individual social consciousness: be group agents of change and encourage members to be peaceful citizens of the world.
- Foster tolerance, understanding and acceptance of diversity.

One of the most significant features of these conferences is that YRUU is a youth-led organization. Adult advisors are there for support, and lend help when needed. The primary responsibility for YRUU leadership rests with youth. Isn't that cool? Instead of being stuck as a youth in an adult run world, always being bossed around and told what you will and won't do, this is an environment which is created by youth, for youth. With all of this freedom; however, does come some responsibility.

The Rules of the Con

1. All rules apply equally to youth and adults.
2. Illegal use of alcoholic beverages, illegal drugs or weapons is prohibited.
3. Caffeine pills and other unnecessary drugs are not allowed.
4. NO SEX!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
5. Sexual behavior which detracts from the conference community will not be tolerated.
6. Cars are off limits during the conference except for retreat business.
7. Smoking is not condoned during the conference for youth or adults.
8. Attendees will remain on site at all times.
9. Everyone must attend all mandatory planned activities.
10. Single sex and co-ed sleeping areas will be available. At least one adult will be assigned to each sleeping area.
11. Being outside designated areas after curfew is prohibited.
12. Adhere to site rules.
13. In the event of a rules infraction, the Conference Rules Committee will be convened to determine the consequences of the rule infraction.

Enough of all that boring stuff though, let's get to the FUN!

Touch Groups: Chances are, you've already been to the orientation and have just finished up with a meeting especially for new people. Pretty soon now, you're going to be heading off to something we call Touch Groups. These are small groups of people who you'll be meeting with throughout the con. The groups are there to help you get to know new people and provide a supportive and close knit community. Your touch group leader will make sure that your group is not only a place to have fun, but also a safe space where you can share your concerns about how the con is going, or any other feelings you might have.

Worship: Not long after touch groups get out, you'll be whisked off to Worship. Worships are one of the biggest parts of the spiritual experience of YRUU. The Friday night worship tends to be an emotionally easy, welcoming worship, whereas the Saturday one will often be a deeper and emotionally involved one, often bringing the community together in a powerful way or tying together...what the con has been. We encourage you to seek out members of the con community (especially those people you've met in your touch group) if you feel you'd like someone to talk to after a worship.

Worships are generally the last scheduled event on a Friday night at the con. Con attendees are free to stay up as late as they want talking, but it's generally encouraged to get some sleep (at least on Friday) because there's still a lot more Con to come, and it's a shame to spend most of your time just trying to stay awake.

Workshops: On Saturday, you'll have a chance to go to a variety of workshops. These can be both fun and informational, and can cover topics such as poetry, finger painting, healthy sexuality, social action, and everything in between. You'll find out all of the details about the workshops at the Spirit Circle on Saturday morning.

Coffee House, Worship, Dance: A couple of the other highlights for Saturday include the Coffee House where people get up and show off all of their lovely talents such as singing, dancing, poetry, skits, and more. There will be worship on Saturday night, and the last event of the night is usually the Dance. Sunday mornings are pretty simple and straight forward. Everyone gets up, packs up their belongings, there is usually one last Closing Circle and then everyone says their tearful goodbyes and goes home.

A few more things you should know about cons:

- **Show of Affection:** Cons tend to be very close knit and intimate environments. Conferees often show their affection for each other through such means as hugs, backrubs, and the infamous phuufings. Although some people really enjoy these aspects of Cons, not everyone feels the same. It's important to remember that it's perfectly OK to tell someone that you don't feel comfortable with what they're doing. Be firm, direct and to the point, and people should almost always get the message. If not, see one of the members of the Con staff for help. **Remember, No Means NO!**
- **Chaplains:** One of the very best resources available at Cons are the Chaplains. These are very special people who are very good listeners and counselors. If at any time during the conference, you find that you'd really like someone to talk to, the chaplains will be there for you. Don't feel ashamed or guilty, chaplains love serving people; after all, that's why they've chosen to become chaplains. Every conference should have at least one youth chaplain and one adult chaplain. These people are pointed out during the orientation, but if you're unsure as to who they are, any member of the Con staff will be able to help you find one (or help one to find you). Anything you say to a chaplain will be held Completely Confidential by the chaplain.

Steps for Planning an Awesome Training

Written up by Leslie Massicotte (2007)

Other Resources: *Training Planning Guide*, *Chrysalis Training Coordinator Cheat sheet*

1. Go to <http://www25.uua.org/YRUU/trainings/trainreq.html> and fill out the **Training Request Form**. This form goes to the Youth Office to let them know you want to have a training conference. The Youth Office makes sure your date is okay and then looks for trainers. Ask the DYSC if you have any trouble filling in the information. Printing out the form once you've completed it is also a good idea. All of this should be going on no less than 4 months before your training is scheduled to happen, preferably 6 months before.
2. If you haven't heard from the Youth Office after a couple weeks, **call the Chrysalis Consultant in the Youth Office**. Let him/her/per know about the training and ask if there are trainers available.
3. Call or email the **site** of the training to secure the location. Make sure the training goes on the church's calendar, and the church is aware of and okay with everything going on. Oftentimes, all parts of the church are not available for the whole weekend. Make sure the training still has enough room to function if this is the case.
4. Once the location is secure and you have hopefully found trainers, **report to the DYSC** about what's going on. (It's a good idea to always let the DYSC know what you're doing and what's going on with the training.) They can help you figure out factors like cost, food, staff, etc.
5. **Cost** is huge. Determine the cost of hiring and transporting the trainers. (Both these figures can be found on the Training Request Form that you filled out earlier; a \$750 equalization fee must be paid to the Youth Office for the trainers' travel expenses. Also, each trainer should receive a \$300 minimum stipend. Housing for the trainers also must be factored in—see "Housing".) Let the DYSC know how much you need to spend for the training and be sure the budget can handle it.
6. Talk to the DYSC about filling **staff** positions for the training. There should be a Youth Coordinator (you, probably), Registrar, Adult Supervisor, and someone in charge of food.
7. **Publicity** is also huge. Since all DYSC events are sponsored by the Heartland District office, it has the ability and resources for district-wide publicity. The District office will email and/or snail mail flyers and registration forms to all District Religious Education Directors (and any other designated groups), post the event on the District website, send out in monthly congregational mailings, and post on the bi-weekly electronic newsletter. The YRUU District Coordinator will post the event to the YRUU page on the District website.
 - Make a catchy flyer that informs people about the training. (See sample flyer) The flyer should include a registration deadline and whether or not onsite registration will be accepted.
 - Email the flyer ONLY to the District office (office@heartlanduu.org). The District office maintains templates of the standard youth and adult registration forms, so it's not necessary to reproduce these forms for each event.

8. **Registration** is very important. The Heartland District office is required to send registration lists from District youth events to The Youth Office at the UUA. The registrar is responsible for keeping track of all registration forms and emergency contact forms for people attending the event, as well as any onsite registration fees. The District office will collect registration forms and fees that come in prior to the event and make sure the registrar has copies of everything.
- When sending the flyer to the District office, indicate who the registrar will be with their contact info.
 - The District office will keep track of registrations and fees on an Excel spreadsheet and share this with the registrar. Just prior to the event, a final spreadsheet, along with copies of the registrations and emergency contact forms, will either be mailed or faxed to the registrar. The registrar should keep the registrations and emergency contact forms in a binder with alphabetical tabs for ease in locating specific registrations when needed.
 - Because the Heartland District is funding the event and the income from the event goes to replenish the District budget for expenses incurred at youth events, the registrar is responsible for completing and returning to the District office an Event Reporting form along with any onsite registrations and fees. The report should also include any requests for expense reimbursement. The District office will supply the registrar with the Event Reporting form, along with instructions, prior to the event. The report should be returned to the District office within two weeks after the event.
9. **Food** can be handled in many different ways. You can have someone on staff dedicated to making meals; they would buy food beforehand and prepare it onsite. But you don't have to have a food person on staff: you could buy your own food and have a few staff members prepare it. Another option is to ask a few members, or the Junior High youth group, of the church beforehand if they would be willing to bring in and serve a meal for the training.



HAVING TROUBLE COMING UP WITH A FLYER FOR A CON?

THE DISTRICT OFFICE KEEPS ELECTRONIC FILES OF ALL DYSC CON FLYERS GOING BACK SEVERAL YEARS.

CONTACT THE DISTRICT ADMINISTRATOR OFFICE@HEARTLANDUU.ORG TO REQUEST COPIES.


Big 'Ole Con Food Planning Guide!

(Created by: Michael Ohlrogge, HUUD DYSC 2002-2003)

Congratulations on volunteering to plan and coordinate food for a con! It's a big job, but an extremely important one, and one that will give you invaluable experience and knowledge of some of the technical details of what it takes to make an event happen.

Things to remember:

1. Check with the hosting church to see if they are interested in providing one of the Saturday meals. It can be a way to involve local church members and it can help keep the costs down. Be sure to remind the people coordinating this piece about the need for some vegetarian and vegan options.
2. If at all possible, find someone with a membership to a place like Sam's Club where you can buy bulk food. This will make things both cheaper and easier. The purchase estimates in this guide, however, are based on regular grocery store package sizes. Some adjustments maybe required
3. Speaking of adjustments, obviously, if your con is smaller than 80-100 people, adjust the proportions accordingly. You should have a decent idea of the size of the con a couple days before hand based on the registration forms. Always assume more people than registrations though. It's customary to plan for 5% more.
4. This guide should only be taken as that, a guide. Look at the packages and the number of servings on them for another good guide. For something that will be eaten by all of the people at the con, taken the number of people and add 20% to that, this is a good number of servings to try to aim for.
5. ***Pay close attention to vegetarian and vegan issues!!!*** Make sure that your vegans are well accommodated or else they will become irritable. This guide was based on about 25% of the con being vegetarian. Registration forms will tell you about the percentages for your con, and adjust the meal planning and purchasing accordingly. Also, be careful that non-vegetarians don't eat the vegetarian food (i.e. vegetarian pasta sauce, beans instead of meat for tacos, etc) or else you will run out of veggie food and the vegetarians will become irritable.
6. Looking for a way to make the salads extra "fancy"? Chop up extra vegetables (carrots, tomatoes, cucumbers, etc.) and put in the pre-made salad fixins.
7. Snacks should be left out pretty much all the time (even during meals because some people prefer to subsist for the entire weekend on peanut butter and jelly). Don't put it all out at once though; just make sure there's always Tang, bread, peanut butter, jelly, fruit, etc. out.
8. After the con, you can give excess food (if it's unopened) to a local food bank or to starving college students at the con. Don't give it to the church, they probably won't want it and won't have anything to do with it.
9. Don't be afraid of running out of stuff. It will happen no matter what. Even the best planned meal plan won't be able to anticipate who exactly comes to the con and what people happen to be hungry for. You've got a gofer on the staff for a reason. Use them!
10. Remember, this guide is a rough draft and a work in progress. Please feel free to attach your comments from experience! Say which foods you ran out of and which ones you had too much of. If you do a different food for a meal, throw in buying instructions for that as well to give people variety.

Sample CON Menu Checklist				
Group Size	80-100 people			
Menu	Friday:	Snacks		
	Saturday:	Bagels & cereal for breakfast		
		Burritos for lunch		
		Pasta for dinner		
	Sunday:	Bagels & cereal for breakfast		
Grocery List	Snacks:	Tang to make 30 quarts		
		Lemonade to make 16 quarts		
		Kool-Aid to make 16 quarts		
		8-10 loaves of bread		
		2 very big jugs of peanut butter		
		4 medium-sized bottles of jelly		
		3 bags oranges		
		3 bags apples		
		5 lbs of bananas		
		3 bags carrots		
		Other assorted fresh fruits & veggies		
		Breakfast:	15 bags of bagels	
			8 packs of cream cheese (various flavors)	
			8-10 large boxes of cereal (the sweet stuff)	
	4 gallons orange juice			
	4 gallons milk			
	Lunch:		5 big cans VEGETARIAN refried beans	
			18 lbs ground chuck (<i>Use leftover meat in spaghetti sauce for dinner</i>)	
		18 packages of taco meat flavoring		
		3 big bags of shredded cheddar or taco cheese		
		2 onions		
		12 tomatoes		
		3 big heads of lettuce (<i>Use leftover lettuce in dinner salad</i>)		
		15 packages large tortillas (makes 120 individual tortillas)		
		4 tubs sour cream		
		3 big jars salsa		
	Dinner:	2 sets of salt & pepper shakers		
		8 large bags dried pasta		
6 large loaves Italian bread (120 slices)				
1 big tub margarine				
5 large bags pre-made salad fixins				
4 large bottles salad dressing (various flavors)				
12 lbs meat-flavored tomato (spaghetti) sauce				
Other:	4 lbs vegetarian-flavored tomato (spaghetti) sauce			
	1 large package paper towels			
	Cups, napkins, silverware & places (church may furnish)			

Conference Sanctioning Process

The Super Cool and Finally Finished Process...

(NOTE: Conferences MUST BE sanctioned NO LESS than EIGHT WEEKS before the Conference takes place!)

It's important to get your con sanctioned because many times, DREs will discourage youth (and more importantly PARENTS of youth) from going if the District does not support the conference. When your Con is sanctioned by the hosting congregation, the District will distribute and publicize your Con for you! So, sanctioning is a good thing.

Step #1

Print off the letter (page 11) and get the President of the Board of Directors, the minister or the administrative staff position in charge of such matters for the church or facility hosting your conference to fill it out and send it to the Communications Officer on DYSC.

Step #2

Send the materials which will accompany the standardized and mandatory registration form. These must include:

- Additional site rules
- Staff Names and phone numbers
- Workshops (tentative plan)
- Name and address of hosting fellowship
- You may also wish to include a schedule for your conference

The following guidelines MUST be followed in order to be sanctioned:

- Single-sex and co-ed sleeping areas will be provided and all sleeping areas will be monitored by a youth and an adult. However, if the conference is for Jr. High age, only single sex sleeping areas are permitted. In addition, all rooms used for sleeping must be dimly lit and easily visible to monitors (i.e. no shut doors). Driver sleeping areas must be provided in a quiet area. Adults who are sleeping in the same room as youth must have their sleeping space clearly marked. At least two monitors (one youth and one adult) must be on duty at all times during the night. These monitors can come from the conference staff, the DYSC, or the congregational community. The names and phone numbers of the designated monitors must be provided ahead of time as a prerequisite for sanctioning. A quiet sleeping room for these monitors during the day is strongly recommended.
- If you are turning conferees away, they must be informed of this at least TWO weeks before the conference. If this is the case and conferees still show up without registration, they must be provided with sleeping arrangements on Friday night. If conferees are sent home that night, action may be taken against those running the conference.
- It should be ADVERTISED that scholarships are available. However, a written request must be submitted to those running the conference no less than two weeks before the conference. Those requesting scholarships must be informed if they have been accepted or not no less than one week before the conference. If you are unable to provide scholarships, the DYSC is willing to assist you.
- The conference should have a youth/adult ratio of AT LEAST 1 adult to every 10 youth from each church. For a junior high conference, this ratio must be 1 adult to every 5 youth
- At least one person with first aid training should be at your conference (I would like their name and phone number/e-mail address)
- A DYSC representative will be assigned to you at the time you are sanctioned (this person's name and number should be put on the registration form).

- You should have food-that is VERY important. Be sure to provide plenty of food and provide options for those who are vegetarian and vegan, as well as those who aren't.
- Your conference staff should consist of AT LEAST:
 - TWO youth and adult co-deans (if a junior high con, only two co-deans are required, at least one of which must be an adult)
 - a registrar
 - a gopher(one person designated to leave the conference and get materials that are needed; someone familiar with the city the conference is being held in)
 - youth and adult chaplains (for Jr High cons, the youth chaplains must be of high school age)
- AT LEAST three dollars from each registration must be given to the DYSC. This is newly updated due to the newly-passed "AR tax." It must be clearly stated in the registration form where the rest of the money from registration is going (ie: to the District, to a youth group, a social justice cause, etc.) Cluster YACs are a part of the District, and therefore cannot have their own accounts.
- If there is a limit on the number of attendees, put on this number on the registration form, and tell me how you plan to enforce this limit. Limits for con attendance must adequately account for the space limitations of the facility housing the conference.
- After orientation (or some type of all conference meeting where the rules are strongly re-iterated to the conferees), an over 18 year-old meeting and a new people meeting must be held. Those who are new and over 18 go to the over 18 meeting. Basically, this is a meeting where it is re-iterated that those over 18 can be held legally responsible for their actions, as well as the actions of those around them. The new people meeting should help new conferees understand conferences and feel more at ease. The staff must make a sincere effort to reiterate the importance and meaning of the rules to conferees that arrive after the orientation. If necessary, a second orientation should be held on Saturday morning
- Workshops or other activities addressing issues such as sexuality must be thoroughly explained on the registration form. This should include who is leading the workshop or activity, what their qualifications are, and what topics will be covered. Failure to do this may result in the workshop or activity not being allowed to take place

Step #3

Once all this info is received, you will get an email or call saying you are sanctioned! At this point, you will want to send an email out to the [huud-yruu list server](#) so as to communicate about your con to all the youth who aren't in youth groups.

Make sure to put on the registration form that the con is sanctioned and include the name and contact info of your DYSC rep.

Conference Rules Committees (CRC's)

A Conference Rules Committee MUST be called if ANY rules are violated.

A CRC must include:

- Both youth and adult co-deans
- One other member of the Conference staff
- The DYSC rep
- The offending party/parties
- A youth and adult from each offender's fellowship.

If there are multiple offenders, the CRC should meet with person individually and then with the all of the offenders. The DYSC rep will have CRC experience and will help the Conference staff.

Sanctioning Letter FROM Congregation Board President

This letter is the first step to being sanctioned.
Preferably, this letter should be printed on congregation letterhead.

(insert date)

Dear District Youth Steering Committee:

I, *(congregation board president name)*, of the *(insert name of congregation)* to attest to the fact that the staff of *(insert con name)* have our fellowship reserved on the date of *(insert date of con)*.

I also understand that my fellowship may be held liable if any incidents requiring the billing of an insurance company should occur during said conference. In addition, I understand that I may be informed of a rule violation by the District Youth Steering Committee representative at the conference. If this happens, I, along with the DYSC and/or Conference staff, am willing to help decide what proper action will be taken.

Sincerely,

(congregation board president name)

Board President

(insert phone #)

(insert congregation address if not on letterhead)

Letter from DRE to Parents

A letter to parents of youth who might attend a district youth conference.

(insert date)

To parents considering allowing a child to attend a youth conference,

One of the ways your Heartland District is responding to the social, spiritual and emotional needs of youth is to sponsor conferences or "cons". The purpose of these gatherings is to provide a safe environment for learning, leadership, developing personal growth, fostering spirituality, and improving relationship skills. The conference activities are designed to promote these goals. The guidelines that conferences operate under provide a structured space for these activities.

Cons typically begin on Friday evening with a welcoming ceremony and orientation session. Rules governing behavior are explained and all participants are expected to abide by these rules. Everyone is then assigned to a smaller "touch" group. These groups are designed to introduce people to others, carry out responsibilities such as meal preparation and clean up, and used as a platform for activities and games which promote sharing and teamwork. After these groups meet, the entire group meets again for a worship service.

Saturday begins with breakfast and another touch group meeting. The assembly is then offered a choice of workshops to attend. Guest speakers can lead discussions of serious topics such as social action or anti-racism. Other workshops focus on poetry, music, or worship planning. Workshops such as tie-dying, face painting, beading, or improve comedy provide a creative outlet. And some like "create your own superhero" or "Radical Cheerleading" are just plain fun. Lunch is followed by more workshops, small group meetings, full group activities, and free time. The evening schedule concludes with worship, the all-important coffee house/talent show, and a dance.

Sunday wraps things up with a brief worship and those always-emotional goodbyes as we make our way back to our other lives.

Jadis Blurton, a UU youth advisor describes the importance of conferences as follows: *This is the age when great philosophies are formed, when great friendships are made that last a lifetime, when values are solidified and shared, when people ponder the moral and ethical dilemmas of their generation. At school, they are too busy with the social and academic demands of the day to do these things deeply, and they are influenced by many different voices some of which we strongly oppose. At home, they have chores and parents and homework and phone calls. During an overnight or a conference, they have a time when they can bond (through play or through talk), when they can sit and think, when they become close enough and open enough to begin to address one-on-one or in groups the problems that they have not felt safe discussing or not had time to discuss in more structured settings. This is why many kids reach "epiphanies" or have great insights or make great revelations or resolutions during overnights and conferences. And we provide all of these opportunities with kids of similar values, in a safe place with no drugs or alcohol, with advisors nearby who can join in the discussion. In other words, this is not like staying up all night at a Rave, which is far more dangerous, or like staying up all night watching Hollywood Squares, which is a waste of time. Our overnights are neither dangerous nor wasteful. Whether the kid is involved in a pillow-fight or a quiet discussion, these nights are ones that will be remembered forever. (Or, at least, I hope so: My memories of nights like these are only 30 years old, but I hope I keep them for another 50 years.) How many times like these are there in an entire lifetime? To have a sleepless night three times a year seems a small price to pay for these memories and these times of great growth in a place and environment of safety and love.*

We hope you will seriously consider supporting your son or daughter's attendance at an upcoming conference. If you have any questions, we encourage you to talk with a representative of the DYSC (go to district website www.heartlanduu.org for contact info) or with your Director of Religious Education.

Sincerely,
Your District Youth Steering Committee

Letter from DRE to Prospective Adult Advisor

A letter to adults considering being an advisor at a district youth conference.

(insert date)

Dear *(insert prospective adult advisor name)*:

The role of an advisor is critical to the existence of YRUU. Adults are there to nurture and mentor the youth that they interact with. The job is not to be a disciplinarian, but to help guide youth in the direction of empowerment and personal growth.

Before getting any farther, there are a few initial requirements for being an advisor to a conference. Advisors must be at least 25 years old due to continental YRUU policy. If you are a parent of a youth attending a conference, be aware that this relationship with your child may create an uncomfortable situation for them. We suggest that you discuss with your child at length whether they feel comfortable for you to attend. Please realize that conferences are for youth to open up and really be themselves. A parent being there may inhibit this to occur.

Most conferences are held at churches or campgrounds. This limits the luxuries you normally experience at home. Sleeping arrangements will most often consist of floors (or couches, if you're lucky) and churches don't have showers. The first rule of all District Youth Steering Committee conferences is that all rules apply to youth and adults equally. This means that you are expected to obey all the rules of the con including attending all mandatory events. We don't want you to be hiding in a corner, and we would love for you to be an active participant. At the beginning of the con there will be an over 18 meeting which you need to attend that will explain some legal issues. Realize that advisors are in a position of leadership and the youth look up to them to follow the rules. At most cons, you will be assigned to participate in a touch group, this provides a place for a smaller community to get to know people and to check in with throughout the con. Your role in a touch group is to participate just like everyone else. This is all a part of the conference environment.

The atmosphere of a conference is very open. It is a place for youth to express who they are and create a community of friendship and love. As an advisor we hope that you will be a part of this community. This is a place where we want you to feel comfortable. You are never forced to participate in activities other than the mandatory events (such as orientation), but we highly encourage you to do so.

As much as this is a learning experience and loving community for youth, it can also be one for you. The more you put into it, the more you'll get out of it. YRUU is based on youth empowerment. Youth are just as much responsible as adults for looking after the safety and well being of the conference community. As an adult, we don't want you to feel as if it is your responsibility to take the role of a parent. We hope that you will come with an open mind, open heart, and an energetic spirit.

Hope to see you at the next con.

(insert name of letter writer)

(insert congregation name of letter writer)

on behalf of the Heartland District Youth Steering Committee