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Youth Advisors Are Key to the Zerohour.com Youth Public Education Campaign

The Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations and Rock the Vote announce a three-pronged initiative to provide youth with public education and resources to address intolerance discrimination in their school communities. These three initiatives are integral to the success of the zerohour.com youth public education campaign kicked off today. First, a Youth Advisory Council Team (Youth ACT) has been created by the Los Angeles County Human Relations Commission to serve as an advisory body to the Commission's Zerohour.com youth public education campaign. Second, the Commission's campaign involves a marketing campaign driven by nationally recognized Rock the Vote, whose innovative zerohour.com tag line will launch today. The third component is the building of alliances with youth organizations and teachers providing human relations programs in county schools. These organizations now serve on the Commission's Youth Advisory Committee. "This is the first time that agencies providing human relations programs have come together to strengthen their alliances and to share a common vision of peace in our schools," says Robin Toma, Executive Director of the County Human Relations Commission.

Cherylynn Hoff, the Commission's Youth ACT Coordinator, comments: "So many times adults make important decisions that have profound impact on the lives of youth. They do this without knowing the reality of the world these young people live in – a world that, in many places in L.A. is violent beyond our imagination. Youth ACT is the Commission's answer to giving youth a voice and the power to positively impact their world."



Talma Scherson, the Commission's Youth Advisory Committee coordinator, agrees. She will focus on working with teachers by supporting the work that they do, developing curriculum that can enhance lesson plans in Rock the Vote's public service announcements dealing with a human relations message. "Teachers are not honored and acknowledged enough for doing solid intergroup work," says Scherson. "It is our goal to showcase and support their contributions to the field of human relations."

The third component is a reality-based campaign tagged zerohour.com by Rock the Vote. The campaign was inspired by Crispin Porter Bogusky – rated the #1 ad agency in America and produced by multiple Emmy award winning Public Interest Productions. Crispin Porter Bogusky contributed over half a million dollars in pro bono assistance to create the concept for the campaign. Public Interest Productions is producing the spots and printed materials at a substantial savings to the Commission as well.

Jehmu Greene, the president of Rock the Vote, has worked on anti-discrimination issues in the past and has led her organization through MTV's "Fight For Your Rights" campaign in 2000 on a collaboration between Rock the Vote, the music television network and the Anti-Defamation League, to bring positive messages to young people throughout the county.

"The zerohour campaign allows Rock the Vote to continue its tradition of fighting discrimination," Greene says, adding "zerohour is a powerful campaign that will engage a new generation in the fight for tolerance and against hate. Our partnership with the Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations allows Rock the Vote to play a critical role in the lives of young people in the most ethnically-diverse county in the U.S. With the expertise of the Commission, Rock the Vote aims to create infrastructures in the county that will carry the zerohour message for years come."

Youth ACT members – young adults from 16 to 20, ensure that a youth perspective is included in Commission programs and policies. The Commission also relies on these youngsters to help both test and carry the zerohour.com messages to other youth. Engagement and civic participation are keys to the success of the Youth ACT program. The campaign's goal is to empower youth to speak out against bias, discrimination and inequity in their environment and to encourage their school peers to do the same. The Youth ACT meet once a month while various committees work on specific service-learning projects throughout the month. These can include training in human relations, social justice, community organizing and civic participation.

Members of the Youth ACT team come from all areas of Los Angeles County and represent a wide spectrum of racial, social, cultural, religious, and socio-economic interests. Youth from the wealthy Westside work with youth from economically distressed neighborhoods of South Central. In working

together on mutually-agreed upon projects, they learn about each other, gaining respect for one another in the process.

Alongside Youth ACT, members of the Rock the Vote Los Angeles Community Street Team will be on hand to elevate the concepts and messages of the campaign through grassroots activities and initiatives that have been the foundations of Rock the Vote's success in the past 13 years. To join a Rock the Vote Community Street Team, please visit www.rockthevote.com.

Scherson also coordinates youth serving organizations, building a network of agencies who serve as resources to youth. These organizations sit on the Youth Advisory Committee (YAC) to provide proactive strategies to address intolerance, bias and racism in schools.

For the first time, the campaign has brought together a network of youth serving organizations working in human relations, conflict intervention and bias prevention in county schools. The members of YAC are developing program work with the Commission and Rock the Vote to support the marketing campaign. Organizations involved in this effort include: the Anti-Defamation League; Asian Pacific American Dispute Resolution Center; Khmer Girls In Action; Asian Pacific American Legal Center's Leadership Development in Interethnic Relations; National Conference for Community and Justice, Long Beach and Los Angeles chapters; Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Center; Stamps Youth Foundation, and the L.A. Youth Justice Coalition, comprised of DreamYard/L.A.; Gang Violence Bridging Project/Youth on the Move; Homies Unidos; L.A. Commission on Assaults Against Women; Public Allies; Santa Monica Pico Youth & Family and Teens on Target/Youth Alive.

For further information on the Youth ACT program and members, please contact Cherylynn Hoff, Senior Intergroup Relations Specialist with the Commission at (213) 974-7629 or at choff@hrc.co.la.ca.us. For information on youth serving organizations, or YAC, contact Talma Scherson, Senior Intergroup Relations Specialist at the Commission at (213) 974-7626 or at tscherson@hrc.co.la.ca.us. For information on Rock the Vote, contact Ara Khachatourian, L.A. County Anti-Discrimination Campaign Director at (310) 234-0665, ara@rockthevote.com.

The Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations is one of the oldest and largest agencies of its kind in the United States. The Commission works to foster harmonious and equitable inter-group relations, empower communities and institutions, engage in non-violent conflict resolution and promote an informed and inclusive multicultural society.

Rock the Vote is a non-partisan, non-profit national organization that joins entertainment and politics to register and mobilize young people to vote. Since its founding in 1990, Rock the Vote has been dedicated to protecting freedom of expression and empowering young people to change their world.