

# The Voice of

*WAGGGS members have a strong and proud tradition of speaking out to bring about change, not just for ourselves but for others as well. Advocacy forms a large part of WAGGGS' Vision for the future. It is even more relevant today than it was in 1909 when a group of girls and young women attended the Scouts Rally in Crystal Palace, London, and demanded to be given a place for girls, launching, in effect, our first advocacy campaign.*

*Today, our global organization is in the forefront on a range of issues on the global agenda relevant to the lives of girls and young women. We speak out and take action on human rights, education and women and adolescent girls' health – including food, drugs, smoking, sex education and HIV and AIDS. WAGGGS' Vision is to be the voice of girls and young women to build a better world.*

*But more importantly, WAGGGS gives opportunities to young women to speak out and influence others at international events. At the regional level, WAGGGS also cooperates on projects and initiatives with the European Union and the African Union.*

*WAGGGS also supports its Member Organizations by providing them with the knowledge, resources and confidence to ensure that the needs of girls and young women are paramount in decision-making in their countries.*

## **Advocacy in action**

British medical student Laura Cottey, 20, is a member of the Advocacy group for the Europe Region. Her first experience with the group was speaking to Members of the European Parliament in Brussels, Belgium about WAGGGS' efforts in the fight against HIV and AIDS.

The Europe Region WAGGGS had organized the event as a showcase for WAGGGS' work and to call for girls and young women to be placed at the heart of European Institution and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) strategies on this issue.

The Advocacy group supports the work that the Europe Region does in relation to the European Institutions and a number of International NGOs on youth, women's and health issues.

Laura credits her experience with the Advocacy group and with Guiding as a definitive factor influencing her life development and career path.

*"I feel I have learned a huge amount working with the Advocacy group and feel that we are actually making a difference to how young people are represented. I would never have had the opportunities to speak at the European Parliament, go to conferences all over Europe and meet a range of people if it had not been for Guiding.*



# Girls and Young Women

girls worldwide say



*"The experiences that I have gained through Guiding have been key points on my application to study Medicine at University and to join the Royal Navy. They have provided me with lots of demonstrable skills and experiences,"* Laura says.

Laura believes that Guiding has helped her develop vital skills in public speaking, debating and negotiating along with the confidence to carry these out in front of groups of people.

*"Guiding has enabled me to have confidence to go for positions and public speaking opportunities."*

At University Laura sits on the Board of the School of Medicine which involves taking part in committee meetings, representing the student body and making policy decisions.

## Speaking out all over the world

At the 51<sup>st</sup> Commission on the Status of Women in New York two young WAGGGS members seized the opportunity to speak up on behalf of 10 million girls and young women. Laura, 15 from Uganda, addressing an audience of 1,000 people, said: *"Lack of sex education is a big problem in my country. I want to learn how to handle sex related issues and to learn how girls can be helped to deal with them."*

At the International Women's Summit (IWS) in Nairobi in July, which was part of the YWCA World Council, four Girl Guides from Burundi and Kenya ran a workshop on how peer education can help prevent HIV and reduce stigma, using best practice from Girl Guiding in their countries.

Janet Rono, 16, and Amina Hussein, 16, told the audience how they were trained as peer educators by Kenya Girl Guides and shared examples of how they educate boys and girls in their school on changing behaviour and HIV and AIDS prevention.

At the workshop, Fiona Kamikazi and Myrine Duhorane, both 17, explained how they use the UNICEF *Sara* comic books to empower their peers and help young women to find positive ways out of difficult situations, often inflicted upon them by men or by the community.

WAGGGS delegates also took part in the Young Women's Leadership Forum, which preceded the IWS, where they conducted an advocacy training session for the other delegates.

An inspirational leadership summit in South Africa involved 25 young women from Kenya, Nigeria, Uganda, South Africa and Zambia. At the 'Vital Voices of Africa' week-long summit, these emerging or already established leaders tackled some of the most pressing challenges

facing Africa: economic development, trade, violence against women, HIV and AIDS and good governance.

In India, the practical application of advocacy in the Indian context was one of the main achievements of the December seminar held at Sangam, 'HIV and AIDS in today's world'. The key message of the seminar was to reach people with information about the virus before it reaches them. The 21 participants from 14 countries used the information gained to develop advocacy plans to implement in their National Organizations.

## WAGGGS and the United Nations

WAGGGS has had a voice at the UN for more than 60 years. Volunteer UN teams are strategically placed in six UN cities: Geneva, Nairobi, New York, Paris, Rome and Vienna. These teams work closely with the UN and its programmes and agencies, including, UNICEF, FAO and UNESCO.

We have General Consultative Status with the United Nation's Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). This consultative status allows WAGGGS to work with the various UN programmes and funds and its related specialized agencies and functional commissions.

WAGGGS is an important participant in major international conferences, such as the Commission on the Status of Women and the World AIDS Conference.

## Advocate better with WAGGGS' statements

To support Member Organizations in their advocacy work, WAGGGS has produced position statements on each of its seven adolescent health messages: "fight AIDS", "discover your potential", "it is important to talk about sex", "prevent adolescent pregnancy", "make healthy food choices", "let's talk about the danger of drugs", "ban smoking in public places" and three supporting statements on human rights, education and adolescent health in general.

The position statements contain important facts about the relevant issue, including statistics provided by the UN and its agencies, among other international resources, calls to action for Member Organizations, governments and the international community and case studies describing advocacy work in WAGGGS.