

Getting Loud: Gen Z: We Want to Live make their voices heard



A group of students led by 15-year-old co-founders Jaychele Nicole and Isabella James is making their voices heard under the moniker Gen Z: We Want To Live. George Floyd's death at the hands of

Minneapolis police sparked Nicole's and James' anger and fueled their desire to create an organization for youth that fights for change so that members of their generation would be part of the conversation.



Left, Jaychele Nicole; Right, Isabella James

“As youth, we saw many people fighting the good fight without us — forgetting us. We are not just the voice of tomorrow, we are the voice of today. There are many pressing issues now that the world is facing that as the next generation we will face later on as well. We are looking to solve them sooner than later,” Nicole and James say. “Our generation has grown up hearing about traumatic experiences and dealing with the generational trauma.”

Gen Z: We Want To Live is dedicated to fighting for their generation through youth advocacy and political influence, which is done by building a strong coalition of skilled young activists. They showed their strength on June 14 when the group organized a protest at the State House with more than 1,500 people in attendance. To honor George Floyd and recognize the tragic way his life ended, protesters participated in a die-in, during which they laid down in the street for 8 minutes and 46 seconds, the amount of time it took for Floyd to suffocate under a police officer's knee.

A group of people in the medical profession also came out to march that day. “There was a dramatic moment where a separate protest led by medical professionals, Code Black, marched up behind us during our rally and we split the crowd in half in order to let them in,” say James and Nicole.

Gen Z: We Want To Live, though mainly for youth, also has a separate group for older people, called Generations for Gen Z. The main Gen Z group has about 40 youth advocating for change while the Generations for Gen Z group has roughly 20 people from different generations. When someone joins the group, they receive a list of 11 social justice issues they can work on with Gen Z. “The issues we focus on are the following: educational equity, reproductive health/justice, gun control, race and police brutality, climate change, LGBTQ+ rights, affordable healthcare, hunger and poverty (affordable housing), immigration, women’s rights, and domestic/child abuse,” explain the organizers. The group also runs workshops on dismantling systemic racism and teaches adult allyship workshops. As interest in the group grows, more demonstrations and workshops will be held.

As for what the future holds for the group, Nicole and James say they hope to see Gen Z go bigger and create more change beyond Rhode Island’s borders. “We cannot just fight for issues at the local level, we would like to see change at the national level. We have some plans to meet with city and state politicians, to release our full brief of policy initiatives, and to host more community building events.”

The cofounders are grateful for the support and help they have received, but want it known that the problems we are dealing with now aren’t new, and they feel young people have been left to clean up the mess of generations before them. “It is time to heal what we have inherited from the generations before us, who are now trying to limit us,” say Nicole and James. Having the different generational group Generations for Gen Z is helpful as it has people from older generations lending a hand to help fix issues that have been around since they were young.

It’s intimidating to think about fixing all the wrongs in the world, but it’s also impossible to stay silent — impossible not to take a stand and demand change. Going against what has wrongfully been deemed normal for decades is what this fight is all about. And the youth won’t be silenced. Gen Z: We Want to Live is just one organization that will keep pushing boundaries and working toward a fairer future for all.

For more information on Gen Z: We Want to Live, email info@genzwwtl.org or visit genzwwtl.org