

Tar Heel Footprints in Health Care

Recognizing unusual and often unsung contributions of individual citizens who have made health care for North Carolinians more accessible and of higher quality

Bronwyn Lucas, MPH ***An Advocate for Youth Empowerment***



Bronwyn Lucas, executive director of Youth Empowered Solutions (YES!), has spent her career as an advocate for youth empowerment. YES! is a nonprofit organization that collaborates with youths and adults to promote community change. Crucial to the YES! framework is the involvement of youths in creating responses to the challenges confronted by North Carolina children and adolescents. YES! hires young staff members on a part-time basis and draws on their problem-solving responsibilities to help build leadership and advocacy skills. YES! has three centers across North Carolina (one each in Ashville, Charlotte, and Raleigh) and sponsors prevention programs that target teen tobacco use, underage drinking, and youth obesity.

As executive director, Bronwyn works with young people on a daily basis, yielding strong relationships that foster mutual trust and respect. These interactions affirm her belief that young people—our future leaders—are vital to the problem-solving process. As Bronwyn notes, “In a cycle of learning, acting and inspiring others, [youths] create a force that ripples far beyond their own lives.”

Several distinguishing characteristics underpin Bronwyn’s success at YES! According to close friend and colleague Jeanne Dairaghi, Bronwyn “really understands that youth leaders will be the leaders of tomorrow and that they are already the leaders of today. It’s so vital to give youths the skills they need to explore and experience this type of leadership. Bronwyn has the passion and vision for youth empowerment. She’s the voice of empowerment not only for youths and adults who are making change in the community, but also for a whole movement that is so needed in North Carolina.” In addition to working with young emerging leaders, Bronwyn also partners with policymakers, legislators, and local coalitions to promote collaboration with and empowerment of youths.

Bronwyn’s personality is such that “she takes the message of youth empowerment to heart,” according to Dairaghi. “She applies it to work, to interactions with staff, and in her personal and family life. She has a sense of humor and is a great person to share ideas with because she is very receptive and has great insight. Bronwyn is really good at seeing not only the details but also the big picture and how to fit youth empowerment and advocacy into the pieces of the puzzle that make communities better.”

Bronwyn was born in Massachusetts and raised in Connecticut. She received an undergraduate degree from Amherst College in Massachusetts and a master of public health degree from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Before becoming the executive director of YES! in 2008, Bronwyn led the agency’s flagship program, Question Why Youth Empowerment, for eight years. She loves to travel and has spent time in Australia, New Zealand, Fiji, Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Ireland.

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