

2006 Amnesty International Australia Youth Summit report

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“A youth summit does not a youth network make”

...but like a defibrillator, it certainly does help kick-start the beating heart of one. On the 29th of June 2006, 70 or so young Amnesty activists descended on Adelaide to attend the second annual AIA Youth Summit. During the summit they participated in workshops, discussions and activities with the view to increasing the effectiveness of youth activism within AIA.

In the months preceding the summit, many of the attendees took part in phone conferences and online discussion by way of yahoo group in order to plan the conference. Being the second youth summit, we had a much better idea of what to expect and, importantly, a much better idea of what we wanted to get out of the summit. At the risk of sounding clichéd, the summit was made up of the youth, planned by the youth for the youth.

The summit itself went splendidly. As an attendee of the previous summit, I can safely say that it ran much more smoothly and was far better organised than last year's summit. Part of the reason for this being that we were given one and a half days in which to conduct the summit, up from a mere one day previously. Predictably though, as the days went on we realised that the material we wished to get through was too much even for the time we had.

I was especially pleased with the content of the summit. In the past, our workshops had focused on the usual broad topics of (among other things) member retention, campaign information and the nuts and bolts of running a group. While we still discussed many of these things this year, there was a greater “big picture” feel to the whole thing. During planning, we outlined a desire to create something that would last beyond the summit itself and we conducted the summit with this in mind.

Especially notable was the integration of workshops run by the change agency. They had run workshops at last year's National AGM (which, both this year and last year, immediately followed the Youth Summit) and those of us who had attended were especially impressed. Their workshops dealt with planning campaigns strategically and were informative, fun and interactive. Even those who were familiar with the material felt that they got alot out of these workshops.

With our goals in mind, our melting-pot of amnesty activist youth shared and created many new ideas during the summit. Many of the friendships that were made (and there were many) are sure to last well beyond the few short days of the summit. In addition to feeling like we had built up the capacity of the amnesty youth for more fulfilling and invigorated activism, we also, owing to the fact that the youth summit and the national AGM overlapped slightly, got a feel for being part of the wider Amnesty movement, both nationally and internationally.

From my own opening address at the start of the summit, right to the final difficult wrap-up plenary session (which was, incidentally, chaired by myself) the youth summit was a roller coaster ride with many thrills and very few spills. The many sessions did much to increase our ability to spread our activism widely and effectively, not only as youth but also as *run-of-the-mill* (yeah right!) activists. From the challenging workshops run by ourselves and the change agency, to the informative sessions such as the one where Amy Viridi spoke of her experience at Amnesty International's International Youth Assembly and where Duncan Wilson from the International Secretariat (yikes!) spoke on the exciting new area of economic social and cultural rights, the youth summit was an energising experience for all. I thank AIA for the opportunity to be a part of this event and I look forward to participating in next year's youth summit.