

Celebrating Black History Month: MLK VOICE 4 YOUTH Provides Students a Platform to Speak Up on Important Issues

By Kyle Babcock, [WSFS Bank](#)

“Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.” – Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Since its founding in 2016, [MLK VOICE 4 YOUTH](#) has provided Delaware students a safe platform to speak up on issues important to them and creatively share how Dr. King’s legacy guides their response to today’s challenges.

The annual spoken word competition for high school students – presented by YWCA Delaware and Christ Church Christiana Hundred – has seen more than 200 courageous youth rise to the opportunity and provide powerful and inspirational performances.

“Student engagement on social issues empowers youth and is known to have a positive impact on school retention and college graduation,” said Jane Rubini, Founder of MLK VOICE 4 YOUTH. “There are no fees to participate. Everything is provided by funds raised through the generosity of organizations such as WSFS Bank, which for the past five years has been a sponsor and for the last two years has also sponsored the 2nd prize of \$1,000.”

Contestants compete at the semifinals the week before the finals to determine the seven finalists. Finalists in 2021, for the first time due to the pandemic, performed virtually to a distinguished panel of seven judges and a virtual audience that included viewers in the United States, Canada, and India.

As the competition has grown, students have discovered a platform to be heard and doors have opened for them through opportunities to connect with Community leaders, scholarships for their courage and creativity, and invitations to share their messages at other events hosted by organizations such as the Vision Coalition Conference, the Rotary Club, and the NAACP.

“It’s a true honor that WSFS has been able to play a role in the growth of the competition over the years,” said Vernita Dorsey, Senior Vice President, Director of Community Strategy, WSFS Bank. “I’ve been fortunate enough to serve on the Planning Committee from 2016-19, and as a competition judge to witness the remarkable messages shared by students through the years.”

“In addition to Vernita’s work for the competition, Herb Broadwater, Talent Acquisition Partner at WSFS, currently serves on the Planning Committee,” said Rubini. “Their input has been instrumental toward expanding the scope of the contest from a county event to become statewide. Thanks to WSFS Bank and others who support MLK VOICE 4 YOUTH, contestants discover their voice matters and that they can make a difference, which benefits them and our Community to create a better tomorrow.”

“This was my first year being on the planning committee, and it was truly a rewarding experience for me,” said Broadwater. “In the midst of a pandemic we had to be very creative, flexible and determined. Our primary focus for the students was, ‘The Show must go on,’ and that it did, with amazing results. I look forward to the ongoing efforts of MLK VOICE 4 YOUTH and working with this amazing organization.”

About the Author – Kyle Babcock

[Kyle Babcock](#) is Integrated Communications Strategist at WSFS Bank. He has more than seven years of experience in product and professional services marketing, communications and advertising.

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