



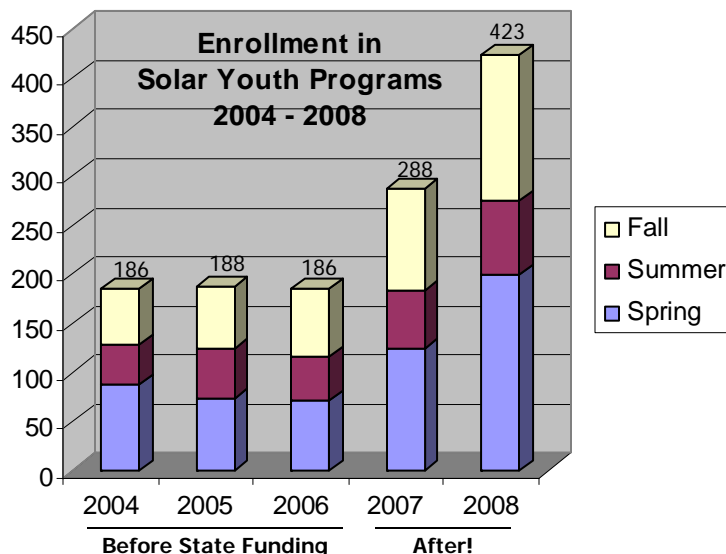
## Written Testimony for Appropriations Committee Public Hearing February 18, 2009

### Joanne Sciulli, Executive Director/Founder

Solar Youth's mission is to provide opportunities for young people to develop a positive sense of self and connection and commitment to others through programs that incorporate environmental exploration, leadership and community service. There is a tremendous need for programs for Connecticut's urban youth that provide developmental supports and opportunities.

**We ask you to renew support for Solar Youth, Inc. in the amount of \$75,000 to continue our programs.**

Funding received since 2006 through the Department of Social Services has made a tremendous difference. **We have more than doubled the number of youth served in our after-school and summer programs in the last 3 years.** It is essential that as families become more stressed in these economic times, that the services that support their children do not disappear. Solar Youth, Inc. makes a real impact on the lives of the youth, families and communities where we serve. Thank you for your time and support.



### Jasmine Webb, former participant, intern and youth board member

My name is Jasmine Webb. I'm 20 years old and I've been a part of Solar Youth since 2000 - as a participant, a staff person and a board member. 2006 was the first year we received funding through the State of Connecticut Department of Social Services. This funding was transformational as you can see on the chart in our testimony. In 2 years we more than doubled the number of youth enrolled in our programs to over 400. Solar Youth has been such a positive, consistent and reliable influence in my life and the life of my whole family - including my 4 siblings, 2 aunts, a cousin and a ton of friends. Right now my 2 sisters are in New Hampshire on a 4 day training retreat. Solar Youth is a program committed to teaching youth about the environment, but it also helped me develop my public-speaking skills, leadership ability, responsibility, dedication and hard work. Solar Youth has opened my eyes to me and the woman I can be. I not only learned about myself and nature, I learn about my community and how I can make a difference. We greatly encourage you to continue support our important work.

### Nehemiah Watkins, 8<sup>th</sup> grade – Truman School

My name is Nehemiah Watkins. I live in the Westville Manor public housing development in New Haven. Before Solar Youth came to my community I was bad - I fought a lot, threw rocks at windows, and other stuff. When Solar Youth came, at first I said "I don't care and I'm not going."

Then one day my best friend convinced me to try it out. It has changed my life. It has helped me recognize what I am in the world for – like achieving my goals, getting a good education, and being a good citizen. At Solar Youth, I am learning how to be a positive leader in my community. With their help, I have improved my reading skills. I have also had many new experiences like outdoor adventures, helping the homeless, and growing food in a garden. I encourage you to continue funding Solar Youth – I know a lot of kids who have gotten into serious trouble, and a lot more who will if Solar Youth goes away.

**Kiara Webb, 4<sup>th</sup> grade - Katherine Brennan School**

Hi. My name is Kiara Webb. I am nine years old. Before I was in Solar Youth I would sit on the couch and watch Scooby Doo for hours. After I joined, I would come home, take off my book bag and run over to Solar Youth to join my program. I am with Solar Youth because it teaches me a lot of stuff I didn't know before. Like going to Nature Centers and while there learning about the poison eye tree frog. Its a lot of fun getting to go on trips like to the New Haven Symphony Orchestra, hiking up Sleeping Giant and camping. In the program I get to plant sunflowers and strawberries, make art and music, work with others in a team and so much more. Please support Solar Youth and thank you for your time.



**I AM SOLAR YOUTH**  
 I am Solar Youth  
 I am a place for youth  
 I am a place of fun  
 I am a place of peace  
 I am a place to be free  
 I am a place to be me  
 I am Solar Youth

*By Devante Pratt,  
 intern for Spoken Word*

