

# MONSOON UNITED

## ASIAN WOMEN OF IOWA

SUMMER SCHOOL OF YOUTH ACTIVISM

PRODUCED BY

**Break** the Cycle

WITH SUPPORT FROM

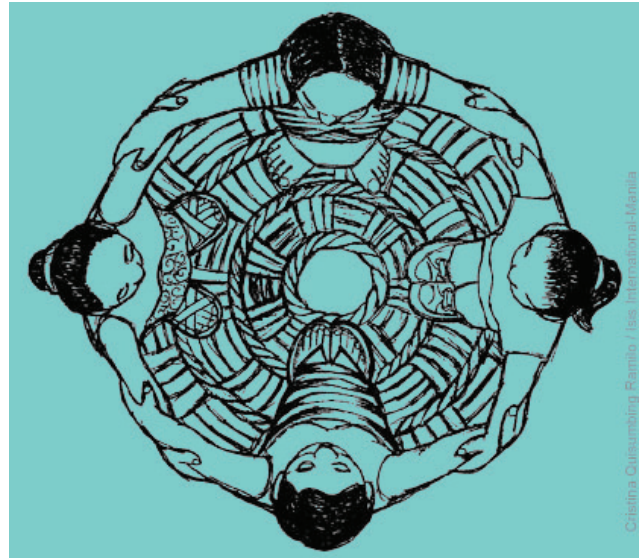


This project was supported by Grant No. 2015-TA-AX-K012 awarded by the Office on Violence Against Women, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, conclusions, and recommendations expressed in this publication/program/exhibition are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women.

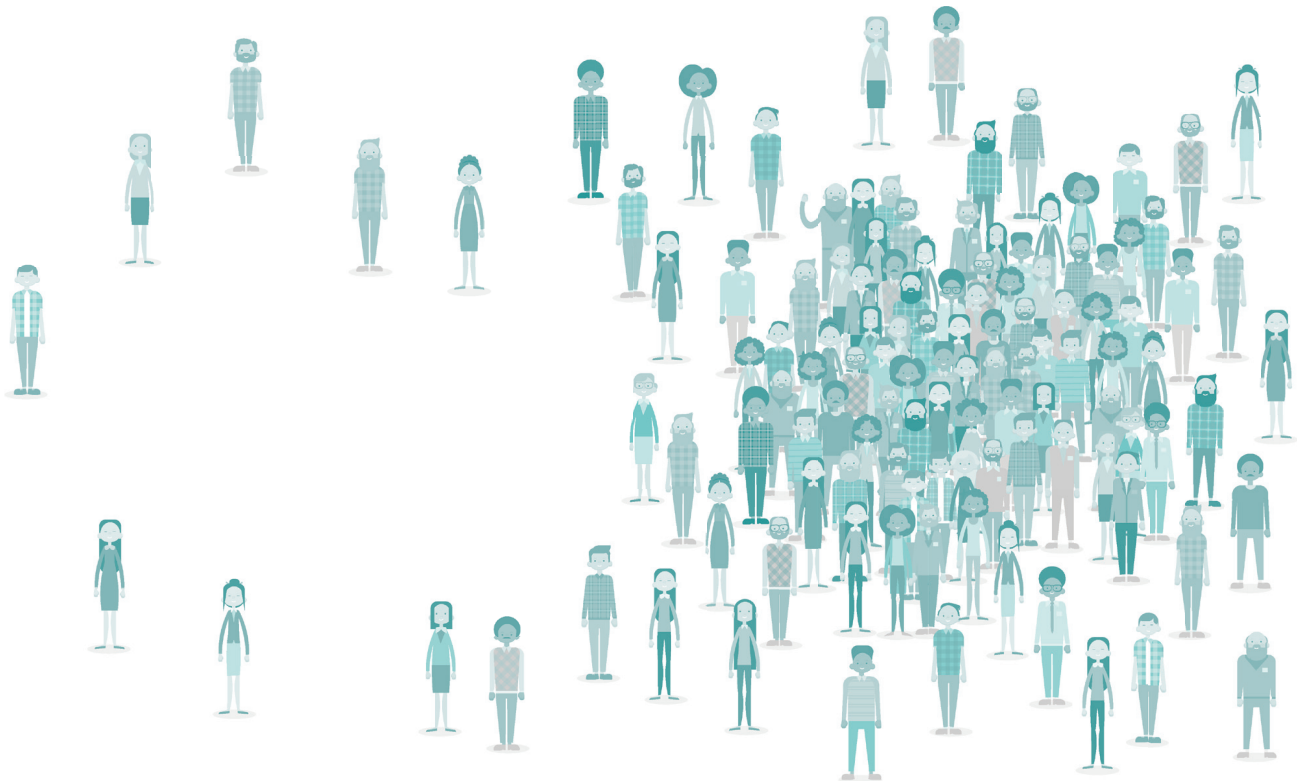


# SUMMER SCHOOL OF YOUTH ACTIVISM

Monsoon United Asian Women of Iowa (MUAWI) was founded in 2003 by community activist Shashi Tenneti and the current Executive Director, Mira Yusef in Des Moines, Iowa. The organization originated as a grassroots volunteer group to provide advocacy services to victims/survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault in Asian and Pacific Islander (API) communities in the state of Iowa. Monsoon formed through the needs of Iowa's API population. MUAWI is committed to responding to the community's needs in a way that fosters empowerment by allowing community members to take the lead in finding solutions. It was with this value in mind that Monsoon started its youth prevention initiatives, and developed one of MUAWI's most promising youth programs. The Summer School of Youth Activism launched in 2014, and it is still being implemented successfully today. In order to understand the program's



establishment and success, we have had to look back at the past few years to recognize the systemic and collective actions taken by MUAWI and other community partners in Iowa.





## SYSTEMIC AND COLLECTIVE SOLUTIONS

---

In 2009, 23,709 adults were raped, and another 25,701 adults experienced other forms of sexual violence in the state of Iowa. During the same year, an estimated 5,930 children age 17 or under were victims of either rape or sexual assault. In total, the 2009 statistics estimate 55,340 individuals experienced sexual violence in Iowa, and nearly three out of four victims were females. One in ten victims were under the age 18.

The Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH) conducted a cost analysis and found there to be significant costs associated with sexual violence. In 2009, the total estimated costs in Iowa were \$5.8 billion; an estimated cost of \$1,875 per resident. This estimate included \$5.5 billion of indirect costs, which were 95% of the total sexual violence costs in Iowa. At the time, direct costs equaled approximately \$308 million. In 2009, an estimated \$101 million in government money was spent on sexual violence incidents in the state. However, government money only funded a little over \$900,000 toward sexual violence prevention efforts and changing societal norms.

Between 2007 to 2009, IDPH convened with the Sexual Violence Prevention Planning Committee (SVPPC) to guide an assessment, and develop a five-year sexual violence prevention plan for Iowa. During the planning process, Ms. Yusef and MUAWI participated in the state project along with other organizations to provide input and give feedback for the multi-year plan. The Iowa Plan for Sexual Violence Prevention, 2009-2017, set forth goals and objectives to reduce sexual violence in Iowa. The main goals were to increase the states capacity to carry out primary prevention activities, and target athletic groups, the LGBT community, and other communities to reduce the incidence of sexual violence. In order to ensure these goals were met, measurements were put in place to observe Iowa's

youth between ages 9-17 in communities receiving SVPPC funding. The expectation was to report 10% fewer experiences of bullying or forced sexual violence.

In an effort to increase prevention system capacity, one of the goals of the state plan was to engage other youth serving organizations and community anti-violence groups in prevention work at the local and state level. As part of the statewide implementation group: IDPH, the Iowa Coalition Against Sexual Assault (IowaCASA), and the SVPPC were looking to increase the number of youth serving and culturally specific organizations by 20%. It was through this systemic assessment and collective planning that MUAWI was able to develop and implement the Summer School of Youth Activism.

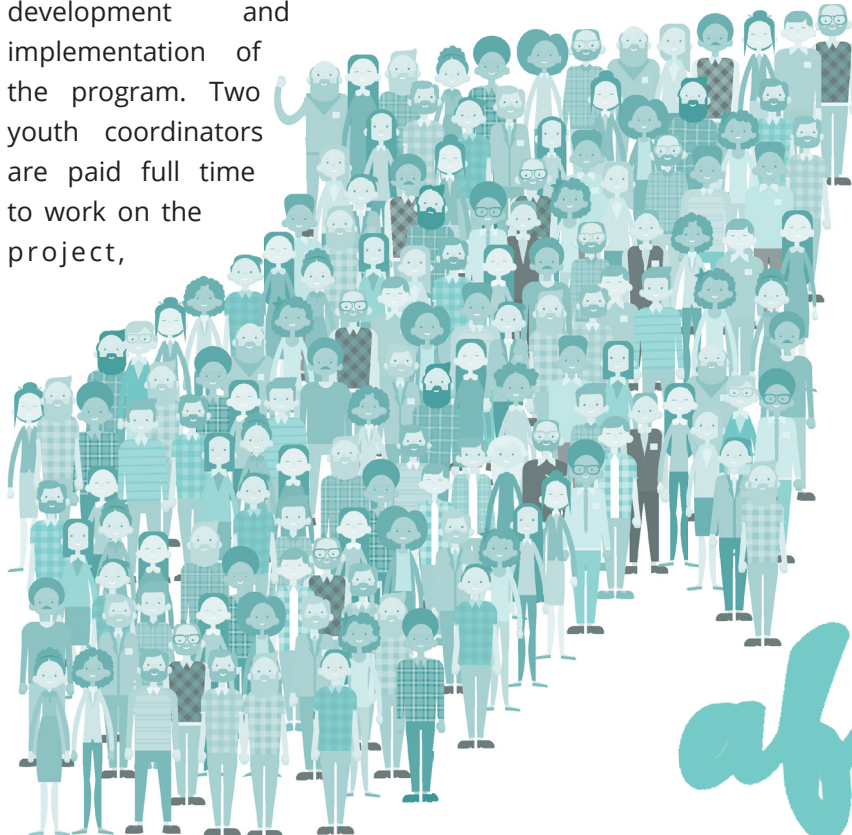




## YOUTH-LED AND RESPONSIVE

Staying true to their intentional approach to community programming, in 2008 MUAWI organized a youth community assessment. As a result, they discovered that young people in the Des Moines area were interested in organizing around social justice issues, but needed the tools and skills to take on the work. In 2014, MUAWI started the Summer School of Youth Activism; which is a week-long program done in partnership with AF3IRM to equip young people with skills to do community organizing with an anti-oppression lens. AF3IRM is a national organization of women engaged in transnational feminist, anti-imperialist activism, and are dedicated to fighting against all forms of oppression. The Summer School of Youth Activism is very unique because of the intentional engagement of youth in the development and implementation of the program. Two youth coordinators are paid full time to work on the project,

both responsible for planning, logistics, recruiting, and running the week-long training for young people. Additionally, paid interns work alongside the youth coordinators, and are involved in every stage of the program from development, design, implementation, and evaluation. According to Ms. Yusef, this approach was recommended by youth working with MUAWI. As the organization constantly strives to engage youth authentically, coordinators knew that providing fair compensation and thought partnership were not enough for the program's sustainability. Ms. Yusef listened to the young people and found that they did not like to be called the Youth Advisory Council. The youth leaders mentioned how the word advisory implies they were only advising, and that their influence stopped there. In response, MUAWI dropped advisory from the title, and shifted to calling their teams youth councils. Subsequently, they actively built youth into every aspect of their work. This is just one small example of how MUAWI continues to be youth-led and responsive; which leads to authentic and productive youth and adult partnerships.



*af3irm*





## LONG-TERM PLANNING, SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS

The Summer School of Youth Activism equipped participating youth with the skills needed to organize and address the issues facing their communities. This is especially important for the young people that come from rural areas where access to resources are not always available. However, now these rural youth are empowered to take the lead in finding solutions that best fit their community. The young people that have come out of the last few cohorts have tackled various issues within their communities including: gender-based violence, Islamophobia, and bullying. Many of these initiatives were formed through grassroots community organizing in conjunction with systemic approaches such as teacher education and lobbying. MUAWI's engagement and development of these young people increased their organizational capacity to address social justice issues, and bolstered the

*"This will not end tomorrow, in order for us to sustain we have to invest in young people to continue the work. Prevention should start even younger.*

— Mira Yusef

capacity for the state of Iowa as well. MUAWI's broad approach increased the prevention capacity and sustainability of the movement to ending gender-based violence in Iowa. Effective youth engagement takes planning and an understanding that the results are not always immediate. However, if planned and scaled properly, youth engagement can be done effectively and sustainably as seen with the Summer School of Youth Activism.



# MONSOON UNITED

## ASIAN WOMEN OF IOWA

SUMMER SCHOOL OF YOUTH ACTIVISM

PRODUCED BY **Break**the Cycle

WITH SUPPORT FROM

