

Igniting leadership in people and power in communities to win change in the progressive tradition of Paul and Sheila Wellstone.

## Empowering a Movement as Big as Texas

This might be the understatement of the year: “Texas is a big state.” Yep, Texas is big: big geographically, with a big population, big economy, and big by the countless numbers of cultures, communities, and traditions that make up the people of the Lone Star State. So if you want to organize the state, to build progressive power over the long-haul, you’ve got a big job to do.

That’s exactly what the Texas Freedom Network Education Fund (TFNEF) has set out to do. Established in 1996 to counter far-right issues, organizations, money, and leaders, TFNEF has been instrumental in defeating initiatives backed by the religious right in Texas.

One of the most effective ways they do it is by empowering Texas students to become powerful advocates for stopping far-right legislation, and promoting policies that will improve people’s lives. This year, a big part of work will focus on voter engagement, and supporting students as they work to turn out their peers in numbers never seen before in Texas. TFNEF has set off on an ambitious goal to increase voter turnout amongst young people by 1% across the state. That means engaging thousands of brand new voters in a state where young people in particular have been marginalized and ignored, and will mean mobilizing communities in every corner of this grand state.

To meet their bold goal, TFNEF’s Field Director, Val Benavidez, knew what they’d need to do: “Move from a pieced-together training program that we did on our own, to a formalized, solid, and world-class training program.”

So the Texas Freedom Network Fund called Wellstone. With the Youth Engagement Fund as a funding partner, Wellstone Action and TFNEF began working together to develop a training program built

*(see page 2)*

## From Ben

Dear Friends,

This past year, Wellstone Action turned 10. And we were delighted to celebrate with so many of you, in Minnesota and D.C., the incredible legacy we’ve built together during a decade of carrying forward the work that Paul and Sheila started. Today, more than 65,000 people, in all 50 states, have learned how to win the Wellstone Way.

Ten years is a big deal! And, like any birthday milestone, we as a staff spent some time reflecting on all we’ve achieved together and all that’s still left to do. Together, we put to paper **why** we do the work we do. What motivates us to Stand Up, Keep Fighting? What does it mean to win the Wellstone Way? What might our country look like when we win on the issues that improve people’s lives? We’re proud to share with you, for the first time, our “What Wellstone Believes” statement of purpose. It’s what guides our staff to get up, every morning, hungry to continue this fight, and determined to train the next 65,000 people, and the 65,000 after that.

Our work continues because of people like you. Because of supporters like Nicky Gonzalez-Yuen, a student of Paul’s and a contributor to Wellstone Action since the very beginning. Here, you’ll read about Nicky’s continuing commitment to build a



Ben Goldfarb

Photo: Texas Freedom Network Education Fund



Student Chapter of Texas Freedom Network Education Fund

*(see page 3)*

to last, that would support students at TFNEF's campus chapters to become top-notch voter engagement organizers.

"TFNEF doesn't just want to turn young people out during this election, but to cultivate long-term leadership development. So we will be working in partnership, on the ground, not on a one-off training but for a long-enduring partnership worthy of the state," says Naomi Long, Principal in Wellstone's Movement-Building Project, who leads our youth pipeline work.

Throughout 2014, this partnership will mean a focus on tailoring Wellstone's youth voter engagement curriculum not just to the state of Texas but to individual campuses. According to Val, "It's a lot of work to take on because we want it to be focused on Texas and our work as an organization, but broad enough for students on every campus, at varying levels of organizing experience, to easily plug into."

And that's exactly the kind of training that Wellstone Action is bringing to Texas. Says Val:

**"We are a statewide organization that does not normally have the opportunity to work with a premier national training entity. We feel very honored to have that opportunity to do this work together because normally it's a big national organization that gets partnerships like this. Wellstone is investing time, energy, and resources at the state and local organizing**

**level—and that's how real change is going to be made. It also doesn't hurt that Naomi is an exceptional trainer. We are learning by being with her. She's so quick on her feet. She's an effortless trainer in many ways."**



When all is said and done, Wellstone and TFNEF will have led intensive two-day trainings on upwards of eight Texas campuses and produced an organizer's resource manual. "We really frame our work as the Wellstone Triangle in action," explains Val. "We're working on all sides of the triangle: community organizing, electoral voter engagement, and meaningful policy and issue advocacy. The Triangle shows us how organizing must happen continually and what important wins really look like."

The challenges, the opportunities, the work—everything's bigger in Texas. It's what we're all about: we take on big challenges and we win. We look at a big state filled with incredible young people, and we build a voter engagement program worthy of their dreams. We take on big partnerships. We develop fantastic curricula. We lead inspiring trainings.

We do big things.



## A Professor and Organizer. Sound Familiar?

Nicky Gonzalez-Yuen, a student at Carleton College in the late 1970s, stood in the campus center, frustrated and tired. As the South Africa divestment campaign of that era morphed into a broader fight to move the college towards more



Nicky and Paul Wellstone

ethical buying and investment policies, Nicky spent the day being pushed around by a college administration that was slow to change.

In that moment, his advisor and mentor, Professor Paul Wellstone, happened by. After sympathizing with Nicky about the challenges of organizing he said, "We may or may not win this one, but the real question that we always have to ask is this: 'win, lose or draw, at the end of the day, who did you bring with you?'" Nicky recalls Paul saying that this was the critical question because if you win without building a base, then you're out on an edge without support. If you *lose*, then you have to start all over from scratch.

After graduating from Carleton, Nicky moved to the Bay Area to start his career as a community college professor and organizer. He stayed connected to his former professor, from hosting a fundraiser for Paul's first senate campaign to

*(see page 3)*

## From Ben continued

progressive movement for both our present and our future, especially among young leaders at De Anza College in California.

And speaking of our work with young people—you'll also read about our partnership with the Texas Freedom Network Education Fund, where we're building youth power at the grassroots to fight back against the far-right's effort to crush the rights of voters all across the Lone Star State. Together, we're going to increase voter turnout among young people, and that's only the beginning of what we've got in store for Texas—and the country—in 2014.

In this year of midterm elections, with every House seat, a third of Senate seats, and three dozen governor's races up for grabs, Wellstone will be battling for our values all across America. We're focused on winning this November—and well beyond—as we work to improve people's lives right now and build enduring progressive governing power in the years to come.

Thank you for making the last 10 years possible. And thank you for standing alongside us for the 10 ahead.

Best, 

## A Professor and Organizer. Sound Familiar? continued



Building youth power in California with Campus Camp Wellstone

working as a Congressional Fellow in Senator Wellstone's office in 2001. "Paul was my North Star," says Nicky.

Now, Nicky is a professor, elected college trustee, labor leader, party activist, and community organizer. So why does he support Wellstone Action? "I can work with students and train them to organize. I can cast the right votes as an elected official. But the big question I still want to ask myself every day is **'who am I bringing along with me?'**"

For Nicky and his wife, Jude, supporting Wellstone Action financially is just part of their commitment. Nicky is also helping a new generation of leaders learn to win the Wellstone Way, including bringing Campus Camp Wellstone to De Anza, the college where he teaches, nearly a half dozen times.

Wellstone Action is special because our trainers are engaged with all parts of the movement,

because our curriculum is intensely customized, and because of our unique philosophy of how we create change. According to Nicky, **"I am convinced that any model of community organizing that doesn't incorporate these key insights of Wellstone Action is not optimizing its movement-building capacity."**

In the end it's all about the outcomes, and after Campus Camp, Nicky's students get to work. "Right away, you start seeing students planning one-on-one meetings, thinking about power in a strategic way, planning out tactics. You see that the students start to feel part of a bigger movement."

And that brings us to why, all these years after walking into Professor Paul Wellstone's introductory political science class, Nicky's still supporting Wellstone Action. "I support Wellstone Action because winning on social justice issues matters. It's how we improve people's lives." Thanks to Nicky, and his students, we're going to keep winning, and keep fighting, and keep organizing, because Paul and Sheila would've expected nothing less from us.



Photos for this article: Nicky Gonzalez-Yuen

## The Wellstone Action Ideology

As we celebrated our 10th birthday last year, the folks at Wellstone Action took a step back to reflect on the values that bind us together, and will carry us forward through the next decade of winning, the Wellstone Way.

We're so pleased to share with you, for the first time:

### WHAT WELLSTONE BELIEVES

We aim to create a country where **everybody's in, nobody's out, no exceptions**. This means that **we reject the ideology of "You're On Your Own"** (YOYO) where a person's success, security, or survival is up to them alone. We believe in power through community, and through collective action. And we reject the notion that race, ethnicity, class, gender, national origin, immigration status, and sexual orientation do not play a significant role in relationships of power in our society.

**We embrace the ideology of "We're all In This Together"** (WITT), or as Paul Wellstone used to say: **"We all do better when we all do better."** Building progressive power is about creating ethical and democratic social, economic, and political institutions, organizations, and movements that reflect the values of justice, inclusivity, fairness, opportunity, dignity, and respect for all.

**We don't just want to be right; we want to win. And we want to win the right way.** Ours isn't an abstract battle. It isn't enough to have good ideas about social and economic justice; we must act to build the justice we seek.

**We believe that things can, and should, change for the better. We believe this change should benefit everyone. And most of all, we believe that politics must be about the improvement of people's lives.**

The Wellstone logo features the word "Wellstone" in a white, sans-serif font. The letter "o" in "stone" is replaced by a circular icon composed of three overlapping segments in shades of green and blue.

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