



Testimonial from Sonia, Youth Leader

It is hard to remember my first memories of this place. I began RE here in 4th grade, 8 years ago. I remember disliking the crowded Catholic Mass I'd attended for years on Easter and Christmas, yet was fascinated by the idea of religious education, especially that which my parents promised would be interesting. My first class in this congregation was called "Stepping Stones," and coincidentally served as just that: my stepping stone to Unitarian Universalism. Some of my peers in that first class are in the youth group with me to this day. And that's part of the reason I love youth group so much. Sure, there are plenty of "old timers" such as myself, but there is also a steady stream of newcomers, people who are just as curious about this unique community as I was when I was 9. And for good reason. The youth group we have here is wonderful place that draws me in every week as a place to relieve stress, see friends I might never have met otherwise, and gain a sense of spiritual belonging that I just don't find in a busy week of school, track, yearbook, babysitting, and the like. And I know youth love to praise cons (youth conferences) - and don't get me wrong, cons are great - but my favorite times are the moments when we can bond as a small group. I look forward to our retreat every year, an autumn weekend getaway that always brings together a seemingly ragtag group- seniors who are best friends, stressed juniors, sophomores who are relieved to have escaped freshman year alive, and the meek and silent freshmen. All will emerge talkative and loving friends after two days of whatever it is that brings us so close.

In addition to all of this, some of my favorite moments at this church have been as a leader. In a year where college apps reign supreme, blabbering on about leadership is something I can do quite well. But truthfully, I have gained a sense of leadership here that has proved essential to many other aspects of my life. As a Coming of Age teacher last year, I was amazed at how well I could act as not only a role model and teacher for the freshmen, but also a friend, which was crucial to them as new members of the youth group, and for some, the church. I think we see ourselves, well, UUs in general, as a pretty accepting group. But when you're young and small and quiet, we're actually pretty daunting! Nothing could top the feeling of watching that group become immensely close during their Boston trip and Coming of Age service. I was sad to see last year come to a close, but ready for my new leadership opportunity as social action leader in the fall. This year, being a social action leader has shown me how the youth group is so well structured. We are, essentially, a giant support system for our members. We provide hugs, advice, a cheering section for plays, concerts, and events, and shoulders to cry on if need be. I'm proud to call myself a member of this group.