

## Friends for Life

BY Joleigh Little

Every year we think it can't get better, and every year they prove us wrong! "They" are the youth who attend Wisconsin Right to Life's teen leadership camps during the summer months.

This past July, 74 teens and college students were trained in four different camps over the course of two weeks. They learned how to explain, debate, and oppose abortion, euthanasia, and embryonic stem cell research. As an added bonus, they were given a primer on how our political system works.

But all this, important as it is, isn't what makes camps so incredible. It was the teens themselves—energetic, enthusiastic, and engaged young women and men—who make all the effort such a huge success. They come from all over Wisconsin, and even from other parts of the country.

At first they are strangers. Not surprisingly, some are more than a little nervous about this new experience. But by the end of their time together, they have become a cohesive group of future pro-life leaders, ready to take on the challenge of restoring a culture of life to our nation and world.

What they learn is critical—and make no mistake, they learn a LOT. (Think all of the information from an NRL Convention broken into teen-sized bites and fed continuously over the course of three to six days.)

Add some hands-on lobbying practice with former congressional staffers, a few mock media interviews, and plenty of real-world debate practice, and you end up with some pretty savvy young people ready to take the message of life back to their schools and communities.

But more amazing still are the friendships they develop during their time at camp. These endure forever.

We've said it before, and we'll say it again—"the friends you make in the pro-life movement are the best friends you will ever have." This is proven true year after year as teens arrive as strangers and leave as friends who will back each other up during the often frustrating school year.

It's one thing to take a stand for life when you're surrounded by people who share your values and agree with your message. But it's entirely another to take that lifesaving message back to high schools and college campuses where you face opposition.

But if anyone is up to that task, it's these kids. As we watch them learn, we are amazed. As they share their thoughts on the issues of abortion and euthanasia we are touched, inspired, and humbled. And as they share their stories, we laugh, we cry, and we are reminded of just how precious each life is.

You haven't heard the best argument against abortion in cases of rape and incest until you've heard it told through the tears of a girl who has experienced the death of a beloved older sister and learned of the new life of a younger sister within mere weeks of each other. "Babies are

precious ... their very presence brings healing, whether you've been raped or suffered some other terrible loss, babies help you to heal," says the voice of experience. "It's just that simple."

And you will never love pro-life teenagers more than you do as you watch them react to video of the late Terri Schindler Schiavo—supposedly in a "persistent vegetative state"—interacting with her family. Their outrage as they realize what truly happened to Terri quickly turns into resolve that it won't happen to any other family ever again.

In short, as impossible as it seems, camp just gets better every year—the teens who attend make sure of it!