Energy and the Environment Action Group

What are the Action Groups?

The Citizens League rallied young individuals looking to get involved in their community and organized two Action Groups, around the broad topics of *energy and the environment* and *poverty and public leadership*. The Action Groups are run in accordance with the Citizens League's principles and guidelines and with the support of Citizens League staff, but the participants are entirely responsible for organizing the projects. The Public Leadership Action Group focused on expanding opportunities for young people to get substantive roles as volunteers for area nonprofits, and hosted a speed-networking event on February 11th.

Problem

Polluted storm-water runoff is a big problem in urban areas, where it is difficult for storm-water to soak into the earth's surface. Rainwater flows quickly over paved and compacted surfaces, allowing it to pick up pollutants such as litter, organic particles, pesticides, fertilizers, gas and oil, and other residue before entering the storm-water drains. This polluted water then finds its way into our lakes, streams and rivers –in the Twin Cities, into the Mississippi River – with little or no filtration.

Question

How can we reduce the amount of polluted storm-water runoff that enters our local lakes, streams, and rivers?

Solution: Rain Gardens

Rain gardens are native plant gardens designed to collect rain water from roads, sidewalks, and roofs so that pollutants are filtered through the ground rather than running directly into lakes, streams, and rivers. They are placed in shallow depressions in the ground so that the plants act as a sponge to draw water into the soil. Native prairie plants are ideal for rain gardens because they are hardy and deep-rooted. A rain garden absorbs about 30 percent more water than a patch of conventional lawn. Each rain garden is small, but collectively they produce substantial neighborhood and regional environmental benefits.

Project: Involve students in the installation of rain gardens

We are collaborating with local schools and other partners to involve students in the installation of rain gardens at their schools or other appropriate sites. Group members have been working with school classes to learn about environmental responsibility and rain gardens. With the help of environmental experts, students and group members will design the gardens. Students, volunteers, and group members will build the gardens this spring.

Partners include MCTC, St. Bernard's School in St. Paul, and Interdistrict Downtown School in Minneapolis. The project is funded by a generous grant from Comcast.