

## **YES! Winter Workshops Emphasizes Creativity in Youth**

Creatively connecting things – either literally duct-taping them together or more figuratively connecting issues with opportunities – was the theme to the three YES! Winter Workshops that recently took place across Minnesota February 1<sup>st</sup> and February 8<sup>th</sup>.

St John's University (Collegeville) Faith Lutheran Church (Hutchinson) and Cascade Meadow Wetlands and Environmental Science Center (Rochester) all generously hosted the high-schoolers as they converged at these Workshops. Students were encouraged to be creative and curious as they participated in activities that were tailored to their energy action projects.

This season, the energy action projects include a diverse selection of energy conservation and renewable energy ideas. Examples include constructing a 'green roof', installing an energy monitoring system, educating their peers about reducing energy consumption, and planting a school garden. With such a wide array of projects, teams in attendance were able to learn not only from the events' activities but also from each other.

At each of the Workshops, students were reminded that "creativity is just connecting things", a quote from the late innovator and entrepreneur, Steve Jobs. To illustrate this, participants were tasked with creating an innovation from everyday objects that would reduce energy consumption or produce energy sustainably. The results ranged from solar powered watering systems to pet toys as energy generators. Clearly the activity was successful at charging our creative minds!

To see the impact creativity is already having on our energy systems, students also had the opportunity to see a variety of businesses and organizations. From tours of organic farms, recycling centers, solar arrays and more, students were able to experience a variety of solutions our communities are already putting in place to reduce or sustainability produce our energy.

Among the many highlights of the Workshop at St. John's was the interaction with the University's own student-led sustainability group and a tour of a nearby farm, Dancing Bears Co. Students at the Rochester Workshop in particular enjoyed the engaging tour of the Olmsted Waste to Energy Facility and witnessing the 2-tonne "claw" collect waste for the incinerator. Lastly, in Hutchinson, a tour of the local recycling center taught all participants the wonder of being able to recycle ALL types of plastic!

No matter which Workshop they attended, students left filled with excitement and enthusiasm to tackle the energy action projects they have started in their communities. When asked to reflect on the day, one participant said "I loved the tour, and I loved how simple changes made to my daily life can impact so much of our environment!" As the many smiling faces and eye-opening experiences will confirm – the 2012 YES! Winter Workshops were a great success!

YES! empowers youth to partner with their community to create economic and environmental vitality through hands-on learning and team-based projects. The program is a partnership of Prairie Woods Environmental Learning Center, Southwest Initiative Foundation, Eagle Bluff Environmental Learning Center and Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation. Learn more, including which communities and schools are participating, at [www.youthenergysummit.org](http://www.youthenergysummit.org).