

Youth Congress of Southern Alabama 2008

Group Reports

Attendees were divided into 3 groups who discussed the same three topics and presented possible solutions. The first two groups were composed entirely of students. The third group was composed of program directors.

Group 1 (students)

1. Topic One: Focus on Youth Development
 - Challenge: desire for instant gratification
 - Youth need to collaborate and unite their voices for a stronger representation
 - Community service needs to be a priority among youth

2. Topic Two: Realize the Value of Young People
 - Challenge: adults don't want to hear youth
 - Youth need more activities that are fun
 - Youth programs need more positive media coverage
 - Communities should support their youth through time, money, etc.

3. Topic Three: Build Youth-Friendly Communities
 - Dislikes: racism, stereotyping, etc.
 - Some youth programs have standards that are too high

Group 2 (students)

1. Topic One: Focus on Youth Development
 - Challenge: lack of youth involvement
 - Challenge: Peer pressure among youth
 - Challenge: accessibility (lack of transportation, lack of availability)

2. Topic Two: Realize the Value of Young People
 - Youth need to be involved with community programs earlier, say in middle school
 - Youth need leadership, funds, etc.
 - Emphasize individuality

3. Topic Three: Build Youth-Friendly Communities
 - Need more activities in each community
 - Need more opportunities for sports, education, job training, etc.
 - Need to reach those youth who don't have any programs for their ages

Group 3 (program advisors)

1. Topic One: Focus on Youth Development
 - Challenges: lack of funding, low participation, transportation, negative media coverage.

- Many programs are available: mentoring, leadership, intervention, churches, etc. that bring awareness
2. Topic Two: Realize the Value of Young People
 - Communities need to get youth involved in programs and promote their voice being heard
 - Adults need to get youth involved with decision making
 - Adults need to pledge to listen and value youth's voice
 3. Topic Three: Build Youth-Friendly Communities
 - Communication needs improvement: better, positive media coverage; mutual respect between adults and youth
 - Adults need to give youth more responsibility and empowerment in their programs
 - Community leaders need to be proactive in investing in youth

Delegates reconvened, gave group reports, and collectively discussed possible actions:

- Increase youth involvement in the community
- Promote more activities for youth
- Promote more service opportunities for all ages
- Partner with other organizations
- Encourage youth to speak up and unite their voices
- Encourage adults to speak up on promoting youth

Delegates rallied around the following issues:

- Racial profiling
- Teen problems: pregnancy, drop out, sexual diseases, substance abuse
- Domestic violence, peer pressure, abstinence

Delegates then agreed to focus mainly on peer pressure noting that many problems stem from this factor. They decided on the following actions:

- Encourage collaboration between youth and adults
- Encourage recognition of positive youth actions in the media
- Promote a change in how adults think about youth
- Be a good example of what you say
- Encourage adults to work on relating to youth and teaching them adult skills
- Unite the voices of all youth, promoting the same focus
- Encourage better communication between youth and adults
- Share program events and invite each other to them
- Youth programs should collaborate on activities and priorities

The Youth Congress of 2008 decided on the following three initiatives:

1. create a central information center for all youth programs (The Community Foundation of South Alabama offered to host)
2. All youth programs will share their information on activities, mission, etc.
3. Address possible solutions to peer pressure.

Youth Congress of 2008 will reconvene in late spring to make plans on the execution of the above initiatives.