

2008 YOUTH TOWN HALL REPORT

Phoenix Youth and Education Commission



On January 31, 2008, more than 200 students from middle and high schools throughout the Phoenix area met at the Black Canyon Conference Center to make a difference. They participated in the 30th annual Youth Town Hall, sponsored by the City of Phoenix Youth and Education Commission, know99 television, and Aarsalyn. Attendees discussed five topics that have important presences in our lives: nutrition, racism, environmental sustainability, substance abuse, and legal residency. After being divided into groups, participants

discussed one of the topics and developed recommendations and programs. The students understand that the conceptual programs discussed during the town hall may already exist, but they believe that further publicity of the programs is necessary. The ideas expressed in this report are not necessarily the views of the City of Phoenix, or any city employees or elected city officials. The following report expresses the opinions of the students at the 2008 Youth Town Hall.



Issue: Nutrition

People today frequently practice poor eating habits. Participants at the Youth Town Hall decided that students need to learn more about nutrition and wellness to ensure higher performance and well-being.

Recommendations

Increase Knowledge – Students felt like they were not properly informed about what are healthy habits. They thought awareness could be raised through news media or mandatory classes.

Make Healthy Food More Available – The teens expressed that if healthy food were easier to access they would be more likely to pick it over unhealthy options. This could be accomplished by promoting healthy restaurants, community gardens, and healthy food at schools.

Conceptual Programs

Find Your Own Health

The City of Phoenix would hold a mentoring program to help those who want to lead a healthier life and improve their self-image. In addition, kids would learn how to prepare healthier and more appealing meals. The mentors in the program would be people who could tailor learning to the specific needs of their student. For example, some students may want specific instruction on how to cook healthy food, while others may want help with exercising and weight lifting.

Good Tasting, Healthier Options

The State of Arizona would eliminate unhealthy food options in schools so students are strongly encouraged to eat healthy food at school. The City of Phoenix or State of Arizona would also help schools subsidize healthy food because fresh and healthy food is more expensive and difficult to find than what many schools currently provide.



Issue: Racism

Although racism now is arguably not quite as bad as it was during the civil rights era, it is still a prominent issue that affects everyone. At the Youth Town Hall, students focused on finding ways in which they could encourage others not to judge people based on the color of their skin.



Recommendations

Education – Youth Town Hall attendees decided that if students knew more about different races and cultures, they would be less likely to judge people. This education could be achieved through mandatory classes in schools.

Public Opportunities for Racial Awareness – The youth felt that if there were city-wide programs installed to promote public tolerance and awareness, there would be more acceptance within communities.

Conceptual Programs

CEC - Cultural Education Classes

To decrease racism among kids and teens, mandatory classes in middle schools would be held in order to promote cultural education. These classes would be held once a week and taught by teachers at the school. The purpose would be to help kids feel more comfortable about their own background and the backgrounds of other members of their communities.



Issue: Environmental Sustainability

Taking care of the earth is an immense responsibility; with pollution and overuse of our natural resources, mankind is neglecting this responsibility. At the Youth Town Hall, participants decided that environmental awareness needs to be raised in order to help protect our environment.

Recommendations

Media Attention – Advertisements and articles in the media would raise awareness of the issue and endorse ways that individuals could contribute in their community.

City-Wide Energy Efficiency – If energy efficient materials were used and endorsed by the City of Phoenix, the city would be cleaner and it would create a good example for the residents of Phoenix.

Conceptual Programs

Green Ribbon Week

One week each year would be dedicated to environmental awareness, during which people would put in extra efforts to be environmentally friendly. Ideally, these habits would be instilled into participants' lifestyles year-round.

Education in Schools

An elective class would be offered in high schools to inform people why we need to be environmentally friendly and ways they could accomplish this. The class would review the science behind environmental problems and address new methods of overcoming environmental problems.



Issue: Substance Abuse

Since substance abuse affects people of all ages, the students at the Youth Town Hall decided that the city needs to provide low-cost programs and positive media reinforcement to educate youth and to prevent substance abuse at an early age.

Recommendations

School-Based Programs – Programs during and after school can help to prevent kids from getting bored and getting involved with drugs and alcohol. The city should maintain and increase the number of after school programs.

The Media – Develop media partners to support a drug-free environment by acknowledging community role models and informational messaging.

Counseling – To have someone to confide in on a personal level, who has experienced the results of drug abuse, would be the most effective way to help those who are experiencing problems with drug and alcohol abuse.

Conceptual Program

Walk This Way

The city would create a program that promotes drug-free events in which students participate through their schools. At an early age, children would be taught to make healthy decisions. As students get older, the program would evolve and adapt to students' lifestyles through better information and by providing extracurricular activities such as dances, concerts, and trips as an alternative to using harmful substances. The program would also offer confidential counseling sessions and support if needed.

Educational Programs

Students in the fourth grade and higher would be required to take substance abuse classes that would provide a better understanding of the issue. Ideally, this class would influence kids to make healthier decisions about alcohol and drug use.



Issue: Legal Residency

Residency status is a controversial issue in Arizona. Though there is no way to know for sure how many undocumented residents live in Arizona, some estimate that as many as five percent of Arizona residents are without legal residency status. Because so many Arizonans are personally involved with this issue, it is hard to find one clear-cut solution. At this year's Youth Town Hall, youth discussed ideas for solutions.

Recommendations

Students believe that the process of becoming a legal citizen should be faster, more realistic, more affordable, and easier. In addition, the process should also challenge applicants to prove to themselves, and to the United States Government, that they can fulfill the responsibilities of being a United States citizen.

Conceptual Programs

Clean Slate Program

This program would require undocumented residents to have a pre-legal visa, take a citizenship test, undergo a background check, participate in a certain number of hours of community service, and be able to speak, comprehend, and write in English. They would also go through a one-year trial period in which they are required to maintain a steady income, submit to being monitored for crime, and all the while they would have full citizenship rights. At the end of the trial period, their behavior and overall progress would be evaluated. The application fee, to help pay for the operation of the program, could be as much as \$300.

Conclusion

The youth of the City of Phoenix are making their voice heard. Students today are proactive in many public policy areas, including global issues like environmental sustainability, or local concerns like nutrition in schools. Participants looked at all levels of these issues, from their homes, schools and communities to the broader implications for our nation and world.

Every suggestion has been derived from the successful 30th annual Youth Town Hall in hopes of establishing solutions for resolving problems in the community. The Youth Town Hall Report hopes to raise awareness of youth involvement and concern over these issues because *Youth Can Make a Difference*.



FOR MORE INFORMATION:

To learn more about Youth Town Hall or other activities of the Phoenix Youth and Education Commission, contact:



City of Phoenix
Youth and Education Programs
200 W. Washington, 12th Floor
Phoenix, AZ 85003-1611
(602) 495-0314 or City TTY Relay/602-534-5500
e-mail: mailbox.youth@phoenix.gov

or, visit the website at:

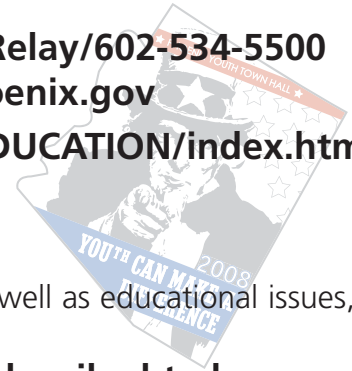
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City of Phoenix



City of Phoenix
YOUTH AND EDUCATION PROGRAMS
PHOENIX YOUTH AND EDUCATION COMMISSION
200 West Washington Street
12th Floor
Phoenix, AZ 85003

