

# 2006 Youth Town Hall Report

## Phoenix Youth and Education Commission's



### ***"Your World, Your Decisions"***

*The time has come for youth to take hold of their world. Youth must realize that this is their world; the decisions they make now and in the future will shape it.*

*On December 6, 2005 more than 250 students from high schools throughout the Phoenix area gathered at Phoenix Civic Plaza to do just that; shape their world through their decisions. They attended the 28th annual Youth Town Hall, sponsored by the City of Phoenix Youth and Education Commission.*

*Attendees discussed five topics: Healthy Teens, Drug and Alcohol Abuse, Recreational Space, Community Involvement, and finally, Stress Relief.*

*Participants were divided into groups, each one assigned a topic. They were asked to discuss their topic, determine concerns/issues, determine solutions, and make recommendations.*

*This report is a summary of that process. Each issue has an overview that provides the general feedback from youth, basic summaries of the recommendations, and conceptual programs developed by the youth.*



### **Issue 1: Healthy Teens**

**Overview:** Health and fitness are prominent in today's society. Student participants in Youth Town Hall echoed concerns about health and teens, particularly in relation to junk food and inactivity. The solutions developed by teens address these areas of concern.

#### **Recommendations:**

- ★ **Healthier Food...** Students recommended that schools provide a menu with appetizing, healthier alternatives to junk food. It was also suggested that water bottles become a more integral part of beverage selection in schools. Realizing that many schools and districts are making strides in this direction, students felt these should be mandatory enforcements for schools.
- ★ **More Activities...** Teens believed that their inactivity is directly related to a lack of available school fitness programs. Physical education has become optional in many districts for various reasons. Students proposed that schools initiate competitions (i.e., relay races, decathlons) which would focus on physical fitness. It was also suggested that more after school sports be made available.

#### **Conceptual Programs:**

*Lunch Menu Revision* - Schools would revise their current menus to be more inclusive of healthful foods. New menus would include salads, sandwiches, and fruit cups giving students healthier, more appetizing alternatives to the food currently being served.

*Required P.E.* - Schools within the City of Phoenix would have to include physical education as a part of the core curriculum. A basic P.E. class would be a prerequisite eventually leading to other classes that meet more personalized needs and desires (i.e., baseball, boxing class)



### **Issue 2: Drug and Alcohol Abuse**

**Overview:** At the Town Hall, participants acknowledged the prevalent use of drugs and alcohol in their families, schools and throughout their communities. Teens said the causes for these abuses could be related to one's desire to forget their problems, curiosity about the effect of drugs and alcohol, and pressure from friends and the media. Students felt that a potentially good avenue of dealing with this issue was recreational activities that encourage students to develop hobbies, and busy schedules that keep drugs and alcohol out of their mind.

#### **Recommendations:**

- ★ **Busy Students...** Participants suggested constructive programs as a means of deterring youth from drug and alcohol abuse. These programs could be large-scale programs, such as teen centers designed by and catering to the desires of teens, or smaller-scale programs such as extra-curricular art programs. Ideas such as "battle of the bands" nights, held at city parks, were also suggested.
- ★ **More information...** Teens discussed the importance of creating programs that focus on both the physical and emotional effects of drug and alcohol abuse. It was suggested that DARE or similar programs be reinstated utilizing instructors who are closer to the age of students.



### Conceptual Programs:

*Teen Centers* - Students felt the creation of teen centers, or revitalization of existing centers, would give students creative ways to spend their time. Teens indicated the center should be in a location that could be easily reached through the use of public transportation. The idea was offered that the center could even house classes about the negative effects of drug and alcohol abuse on a teen's body. Activities such as music nights, dances, and art classes would be the central focus of the center.

*Reinstitution of the DARE Program* - Youth suggested the DARE program be reinstated with a few minor changes. Those changes would include targeting high school freshman as a primary audience and having youthful instructors rather than police officers who relate to students more easily. A recent study released by the Arizona Cactus-Pine Girl Scout Council reinforced the opinions generated at the town hall. The study showed teens wanted a "wise friend" between the ages of 19-25 to instruct teen programs.

*School Programs* - Students said that a good way to keep teens from delving into the world of drugs and alcohol was to keep them busy. It was proposed that the City of Phoenix fund more after school programs that keep students busy. Ideas ranged from increasing the amount of after school sports to include intramural leagues, to offering after school art classes.



## Issue 3: Recreational Space

**Overview:** The youth of Phoenix feel that teen spaces are a vital outlet for physical, social, and mental health. While there are limited spaces available to teens, barriers exist: transportation, safety, and general awareness of those spaces. Hence, few can take advantage of the potential opportunities provided. Teens determined the City of Phoenix must make publicity and maintenance of these existing facilities a priority.

### Recommendations:

- ★ **Increase Transportation Opportunities...** Students complained that many of these existing spaces are difficult to reach for the average teen. They suggested shuttle busses and partnerships with mass transportation providers as a possible way to remedy the challenge.
- ★ **Maintenance, Improvement of Equipment...** On occasion, students find that even if they can reach these centers, the equipment is either substandard or in need of repair. The youth proposed that the City place a strong focus on maintaining the equipment at teen spaces and upgrading when appropriate.

### Conceptual Programs:

*Valley Metro Partnership* - Students proposed that the City of Phoenix partner with Valley Metro to develop routes that would go to the available youth centers. It was felt that improved transportation would increase attendance at the centers.

*Publicity* - Youth stressed the need to publicize the teen centers in local newspapers (i.e., the North Central News, the Arizona Republic) as well as school newspapers. In addition to publicizing the availability of the centers, special events should be promoted.

*Maintenance* - Students suggested that improved maintenance be approached in two specific ways. First, surveillance cameras should be installed to insure absolute safety of attendees. Second, nonfunctional, or outdated equipment must be replaced or upgraded.



## Issue 4: Community Involvement

**Overview:** On average, teens participate in community service projects approximately twice each month. Town Hall participants suggested their motivation for these acts were dictated by school requirements. The types and range of projects which they are involved in include serving food at St. Vincent de Paul, helping at homeless shelters, and overall project planning. Some of the primary problems associated with teen community involvement center around the awareness of opportunities and lack of appeal. It was determined these areas of concern could be addressed through media campaigns.

### Recommendations:

- ★ **Increase Awareness...** Youth suggested that one of the biggest reasons teens do not participate in community service is the lack of awareness. Students suggested a volunteer festival or fair for nonprofit organizations to publicize their volunteer needs and a partnership between the City of Phoenix and nonprofit organizations such as the Salvation Army or St. Vincent de Paul to facilitate youth participation in volunteer efforts. It was also suggested that these organizations advertise within school newspapers to heighten awareness about available opportunities.
- ★ **Focus on the Teens...** Teens suggested more youth-friendly projects or rewards upon completion to encourage a habit of volunteerism. For example, a barbecue following a major volunteer event would attract more potential teen volunteers. It was also suggested that projects targeted for teens have "teen appeal" like working with underprivileged children and environmental clean-up efforts.

## Conceptual Programs:

*City of Phoenix Partnership* - Teens suggested that the City of Phoenix should partner with volunteer organizations such as the Salvation Army, or St. Vincent de Paul to increase awareness about volunteer opportunities. The City could use its available resources such as know99 television, or even school newspapers to advertise available projects. These efforts would go a long way in informing teens of available opportunities.

*Festival of Volunteerism* - Students indicated a large expo or festival with booths representing nonprofit organizations would be a great way to increase awareness of volunteer needs. These events could be sponsored by the City alone, or in cooperation with the corporate community. In addition to showcasing volunteer projects available for teens, the history of volunteerism could be discussed. Schools could also work in conjunction with the City to assure appropriate promotional coverage of such an event.

*City of Phoenix Sponsored Events* - Youth indicated that the City could sponsor specific projects for youth. The projects would be inclusive of a large group of volunteers; for example, tutoring day at a park or at a Phoenix library. It would be crucial that the City select projects that are youth-friendly and appealing in order to ensure strong student involvement.



## Issue 5: Stress Relief

**Overview:** Participants at the Town Hall indicated that stress has a large impact on the life of the average student. Stress affects schoolwork, social lives, and even a person's ability to function within their own home. Some of the causes mentioned at the Town Hall included parental, peer and school pressure, and anxiety about college. Teens felt that good ways to deal with this are through interaction with friends. Discussion could be achieved by having guidance counselors available at schools or hotlines.

### Recommendations:

- ★ **Recreation Time...** Teens indicated one of the best ways to deal with the stress of life is to be able to have social interaction with their friends. Teens mentioned the creation, or renovation of recreational centers that could hold events specifically for teens (i.e., dances, "battle of the bands", coffee houses). They also discussed the desire for more after school programs available that allow for fun activities with friends.
- ★ **Talking about Stress...** Participants said being able to talk about stress was a good relief technique. Students suggested the implementation of a program that would provide guidance counselors at schools whom are available to simply talk. Youth stressed the importance of having these counselors be relatively close to a student's age (20-25 yrs). A hotline where teens could call and discuss stress was also suggested.

### Conceptual Programs:

*Recreation Centers* - Students called upon the City of Phoenix to renovate or create recreation centers where teens can spend time.. Suggested Programs at the center ranged from "battle of the bands" nights, to coffee houses.

*Increase After School Programs* - Teens requested the City of Phoenix allocate more funding for after school programs. Students said such programs were in short demand. It was felt that having more programs available would be a good way to relieve stress.

*Student Mentors* - Students asked the City of Phoenix to create a program within schools that include multiple counselors per school. Students reiterated their desires that these counselors be accessible and able to relate with teen issues.

*Stress Hotline* - Youth called upon the City to create a hotline where teens can call and talk about stress. Students emphasized the importance of having operators who are understanding of teen stress. These volunteers would be focused on dealing with serious teen issues such as drug and/or alcohol abuse, suicide, and relationships.

### Conclusion:

The world really is in the hands of the youth. As proved by this past year's 28th Annual Youth Town Hall, youth have ideas that are creative, but also practical. Responses at this year's Town Hall reinforced the idea that teens need more things to keep them busy. Another common concern was the need to increase publicity about available activities offered at city facilities and service projects.

The call for a teen center remains clear and strong. Knowing that the City of Phoenix does have some centers, it is important that the City take lead in publicizing these resources. More than anything, the 2006 Youth Town Hall proved that teens care about their world, and possess the decisiveness, creativity, and prudence to shape their world.

The contents of this report have been used to develop the Focus on Results (FOR) Grant Initiative that will support activities recommended by the 2006 Phoenix Youth Town Hall. For more information or to download the application, go to <http://phoenix.gov/YOUTH/diverse.html>.



## FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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



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