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Allentown Youth Coalition turning to city teenagers for answers

Members of UnitedYouth, other city students met to brainstorm ways to improve safety, beautify the city and enhance activities for young people

ALLENTOWN – A dynamic group of Allentown youth came together last week to brainstorm solutions to what they view as some of the city’s biggest hurdles.

UnitedYouth assembled 86 middle school and high school students – and some parents – from Roberto Clemente Charter School, William Allen High School, Louis E. Dieruff High School, Lehigh Valley Christian High School, Trexler Middle School, Lincoln Leadership Academy and South Mountain Middle School. The meeting was the result of months of planning sessions by the Allentown Youth Coalition, which is focused on finding ways to support and empower local youth and determine the causes that are most important to them.

The group gathered Tuesday afternoon at the Lehigh County Government Center to talk, answer surveys about life in the city and discuss ways they could enact change. Some of the biggest problems the youth identified in Allentown are violence and safety concerns; racism; drugs and alcohol; an economic slump and insufficient jobs; a shortage of activities for youth; poor relations between law enforcement and the community; a need for beautification in the city and a general lack of empowerment among youth.

That last point may be about to change, as the group bantered about ideas to modernize city parks, adding basketball courts, gardening areas or a skate park; create a recreation center where youth could work or play; enhance lighting and traffic cameras throughout the city; bolster security in schools; enact neighborhood watches; renovate or demolish blighted properties; decriminalize marijuana; and employ city youth to clean up neighborhoods, with the money the youth would earn going to fund schools. The group requested that the next meeting, which will be planned in the coming months, include community leaders so some of their ideas can move closer to reality.

The Allentown Youth Coalition is comprised of representatives from UnitedYouth, KidsPeace, Community Action Development Corporation of Allentown (CADCA), City of Allentown, Lehigh County Systems of Care, Lehigh County Juvenile Probation, Lehigh County District Attorney’s Office, Aetna, Capitol Blue Cross, Penn State Extension-Lehigh County, Hispanic American League of Artists (HALA), Pinebrook Family Answers and St Luke’s Neighborhood Center. Individuals or organizations interested in partnering with the Allentown Youth Coalition should contact Jason Savenelli at Jason.savenelli@kidspeace.org for adult involvement or Michael Frassetto at mfrassetto@unitedyouthparty.org for youth involvement.