

“ON YOUTH BY YOUTH”

Executive Summary

*Eighteenth New Mexico First Town Hall
in collaboration with
New Mexico Advocates for Children & Families
Youth Link Project*

In October 1996, Over 130 young people from communities all over New Mexico met in Glorieta, New Mexico to discuss youth issues. The issues were identified by youth focus groups conducted throughout the state prior to the October Town Hall and were seen as issues especially challenging in young New Mexicans' lives. They were, in order of importance, alcohol and drugs, gangs, violence and crime, teen pregnancy and school issues.

The problems identified by youth were seen as being linked and were often described as being symptoms of deeper problems. The root causes most frequently mentioned were poor environment, lack of adult support, low self-esteem/peer pressure, and discrimination. New Mexico youth voted as the most important supports in their lives: youth programs, families and friends, adult support, and community-level supports.

Some 25 adult participants also attended the Town Hall to listen to the youths and provide adult perspective and support as well as to provide natural adult liasons for implementation. In addition to making up 90% of the participant population, youths also served as panel Discussion Leaders, Recorders, Plenary Session Leaders, and a Chief Recorder Assistant. During the planning stages, a Youth Steering Committee was involved in every step of Town Hall planning, including helping to develop the youth-friendly Background Report and structure special Town Hall activities. As with all New Mexico First Town Halls, care was taken to make sure the Town Hall participant list was balanced to represent the state's diversity and reflect New Mexico's youth population. Youth were also represented on the Participation Selection Committee.

At the end of the Town Hall, the group had come to consensus on specific recommendations for solving the identified problems facing New Mexico's youth. Following the Town Hall, several New Mexico communities announced their plans to hold follow-up community Youth Town Halls using the consensus recommendations from “ON YOUTH BY YOUTH” as starting points for discussion. Among those points recommended at the statewide Town Hall:

EDUCATION:

- Create more diverse courses related to working and skills needed in the real world (i.e. “Bad Boy Baking Company” at Oate High School in Las Cruces).
- Create and encourage community action programs such as Character Counts.
- Create and encourage alternative education programs that incorporate child care for students.
- Provide incentives for business and community programs which work with students.
- Provide better motivation for students, teachers and administration.
- Education gets top funding priority, the remaining money gets equal distribution among extra-curricular activities.
- Grants and scholarships need to be readdressed, re-evaluated and lowered in requirements to make them more accessible to the middle class.
- Duties of educational counselors need to be enforced.
- Create smaller schools (500 students); with a student-teacher ratio of 20-1.
- Broaden recognition programs to recognize the improvement of students with lower GPA's.
- Provide higher salaries for teachers.
- Create cleaner schools with regular, enforced health standard checks.
- Create more comfortable environments more conducive to learning.

TEEN PREGNANCY:

- Day cares should be in high schools or accessible to teen mothers in the community (this will help improve drop-out rate).
- Parenting and sex education classes should be mandatory including information on and awareness of homosexuality, consequences of having children and money problems .
- Evaluate low-ranking states on their teen-pregnancy programs.
- Qualify counselors on sex education.
- Prevention programs should include information on and distribution of condoms and other birth control methods.

DRUGS, ALCOHOL and TOBACCO

- Stores selling alcohol or tobacco must have an ID-activated cash register. A store must purchase its own equipment.
- Create a D.A.R.E. program headed by a counselor (18-30 years old) with drug experience. At the elementary level, police will teach the program, but after elementary school, officers will be replaced by students or people (ages 18-30 years old) with drug experience.
- There should be zero tolerance for repeat offenders of substance and alcohol abuse.
- Create more rehabilitation programs for the state.
- Make random drug tests mandatory for students and school staff. Those found to be abusing drugs will be given counseling instead of being fired or expelled. Second offenses will mean removal for staff and second-offense students must attend alternative high school or classes.
- Create mandatory drug and alcohol classes during school years.
- Commission a report on the pros and cons of legalization of individual drugs, identifying potential benefits vs. potential hazards. The findings of the report should be released through media, community centers and events.

VIOLENCE AND CRIME

- Mandate and fund safe houses in communities where young people at risk or those wishing to get out of or away from gangs can go to escape the dangers of the streets or dysfunctional homes.
- Provide more vocational classes to keep kids in school.
- Encourage and create Big Brother programs to provide mentorship and role model support.
- Stress/emotion/anger management programs should be required in health classes.
- Provide new funding of school programs to prevent gangs.

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