

Annual Youth Summit addresses bullying

By Dana Guzzetti Correspondent Contra Costa Times

Posted:

ContraCostaTimes.com

About 500 students converged on Los Medanos College for a youth summit focused on bullying, its impact and how to make positive choices.

"Bullying is something people live with until adulthood and it has a great impact on their lives," said Supervisor Federal Glover at his 2012 Contra Costa County Youth Summit, which was attended by political and community leaders, including Concord Mayor Ron Leone.

At the 12th annual event, moderator "DJ Watergate" introduced keynote speaker Mark Blackshear, who addressed the theme of the summit, "Ways to Stop Bullying and Build Character" by getting the kids to demonstrate the roles of the victim, aggressor and bystander as he explained the consequences.

Blackshear survived a tumultuous youth in San Diego to become an expert on youth leadership and development.

"My goal is getting the youth to connect with me, and stand up," Blackshear said. "By demonstrating it, they can see what (bullying) looks like. They can see the effect it has and that they can change. It just takes a conscious choice."

A culture of "no snitching" keeps kids from reporting aggressive behavior, Blackshear said. "When kids are harassed, they might not want to tell a teacher because they think they are not going to do anything about it, or they may end up with more trouble," but he emphasized, "you can remain anonymous."

Blackshear reported that incidences of bullying at school have increased from 57 percent in 2009 to 81 percent today, and that bullied kids are two times as likely to take their own lives, according to Health Service Resource Administration statistics.

Guest speaker Contra Costa County District Attorney Mark Peterson urged students to graduate from high school and take advantage of learning opportunities such as the daylong summit which also included drama, how-to workshops, demonstrations, activities, entertainment and breakfast and lunch.

Peterson's statistics were startling: "Half a million Californians turn (age) 20 with no diploma. A person who does not graduate from high school is eight times more likely to be in jail. Sixty-eight percent of the prisoners don't have a diploma."

Peterson said that the last two individuals he had prosecuted on a charge of murder were 18 years old.

"They cost \$50,000 a year for life. You will pay, not your parents. I don't want to put people in prison," he said. "The cost of sending someone to prison is more than sending them to (UC) Berkeley for the rest of their life.

"Graduating from high school is your choice," Peterson told the students. "If the graduation rate was 10 percent greater, I would be able to prosecute 20 fewer murders and 500 fewer assaults each year."

Finally, Peterson equated high school graduation to winning the lottery because graduates statistically earn hundreds of thousands of dollars more over a lifetime.

For the first time, a contingent of West County students attended what has historically drawn East County youth. Pastor Anthony Hodges of the New Horizons Career Development Center accompanied 143 young people from Crockett, Pinole, Hercules and Rodeo on buses provided by Conoco Phillips.

"They were really enamored with Kaiser's Educational Theater Programs performance," Hodges said. "They thought it was relevant and liked the handout. They appreciated the first aid and CPR workshop, especially those with elderly grandparents. It was great."

ETP has performed in schools and events for 25 years to nurture a healthy "mind, body and spirit." From the time the curtain rose on ETP's "Nightmare on Puberty Street," until the end of the question-and-answer period that followed, the audience was intensely engaged.

Students could see how to deal with peer pressure and other adolescent issues in a dramatic, believable and humorous setting.

"They do a phenomenal job," said Paul Adler, Glover's administrative assistant and the event organizer. "I am very pleased with the content that they provided. It was exactly what Supervisor Glover wanted."

Despite dark themes, the day was full of fun and information, said Ebony Wainwright, a senior at New Horizons, working on her GED. "Everything was useful, but I really liked the job development workshop, where they talked about resumes," she said.

Other topics covered how to get a summer job or any kind of a job, including a presentable appearance, demeanor, references, resumes and job search tips.

"I definitely would recommend it to other students," said Wainwright, who plans to study nursing at Contra Costa College and work.

The American Shaolin Kempo martial arts demonstration stole the show at lunchtime where students enjoyed a meal from Pittsburg's Mecca restaurant. Other highlights included three-on-three basketball sessions, airbrush tattoos and manicures.

Contact Dana Guzzetti at dguzzetti10@gmail.com or call 925-202-9292.

youth summit on TV

The Contra Costa Youth Summit, sponsored by Supervisor Federal Glover, is scheduled to be broadcast at 10 a.m. April 27, on CCTV Comcast Channel 27, Astound Channel 32 and AT&T U-verse Channel 99.