



## YouthAction Community Leadership Course Findings and Recommendations on Youth Issues in NYC

The YouthAction Community Leadership Course (YCLC) is a program of Citizens' Committee for Children (CCC), and is made up of high school students from New York City's public and private schools. CCC is a sixty-seven-year old child advocacy organization that seeks to ensure that every child is healthy, housed, educated, and safe. Since 1999, YouthAction NYC has introduced aspiring young leaders to civic engagement and advocacy opportunities.

During this ten-week advocacy-training course, YCLC participants meet once a week after school to research and analyze a variety of youth issues, and to develop policy and budgetary recommendations to improve the lives of young people in New York City. This semester, the YCLC surveyed 120 youth between the ages of 12 and 21 to get their opinions on major youth issues, and also visited youth-serving programs and agencies. The following is a summary of the group's findings and recommendations for the City Council.

### Findings and Recommendations

Our research shows that youth in NYC believe the issues that most negatively impact young people are ***Gang Violence, Bullying, Teen Pregnancy, Drugs/Alcohol, and Child Abuse/Neglect.***

**YCLC members believe that the prevalence of these 5 issues lead to high levels of peer pressure and stress among youth. More than 50% of the youth we surveyed reported that stress was one of the biggest issues in their lives.**

- The proposed cut of 16,000 Out of School Time slots will contribute to the prevalence of issues that negatively impact youth in New York City.
- The loss of Summer Youth Employment jobs will leave more youth with nothing to do over the summer, perhaps leading to an increase in delinquent behavior. This loss will also deprive youth of the opportunity to gain valuable work experience and build new skills.
- YCLC participants oppose the elimination of Runaway and Homeless Youth Programs as well as the Suicide Prevention Hotline, as we believe these are important programs that save lives.

**40% of the youth we surveyed do not believe that New York City government is working toward solutions to the problems that most negatively affect youth. 22.5% do believe that NYC government is working toward solutions, and the remaining stated that they did not know.**

- YCLC students recommend that school, community, and government officials find ways to engage youth in program and policy development, especially when they are programs and policies that affect youth.
- School, community, and government officials should inform youth of the initiatives that are being planned or are already in place to combat issues that negatively affect youth. YCLC students recommend that the use of advertisements, public service announcements, and social media be done in a way that effectively targets youth.

#### ***Gang Violence***

- YCLC students recommends better training and supervision of police officers assigned to gang and school safety units.
- YCLC students suggest that Police Officers be involved in rigorous community initiatives aimed at stopping gang violence and preventing youth from joining in the first place.

#### ***Bullying***

- To educate students, parents, and educators, YCLC students recommend that there be programs built into the school year to raise awareness about bullying among students (i.e.: community events, peer mentors, team-building activities).



- There should also be programs to educate and encourage parents to monitor their child's online activity to prevent cyber-bullying.

**Teen Pregnancy** YCLC members believe that NYC government and schools are doing an adequate job educating youth about teen pregnancy, and that they should continue their efforts in this area.

### **Drugs and Alcohol**

- YCLC students recommend more extra-curricular activities to keep youth occupied after school, on weekends, and during holidays and schools breaks.
- YCLC believes there should be more programs aimed at actively preventing the illegal use of drugs and alcohol by youth, as we believe spending money on prevention now will save a lot of money treating and/or incarcerating drug and alcohol abusers later in life.
- Young people arrested for drug and/or alcohol use should go through alternative programs like the Harlem Youth Court, where they are encouraged to explore the sanctions against them and have a personal connection with their judge and jury. This prevents repeat offenses.

**Child Abuse and Neglect** YCLC participants are concerned about the situations of older youth in the foster care system:

- YCLC students suggest that group homes and other institutions that house older foster youth be better staffed and monitored to prevent violence, theft, and other delinquent behavior.
- YCLC students believe that older foster youth should be given the opportunity to work for wages and receive a higher weekly or monthly allowance.
- Because many young people in detention centers have had experiences with the foster care system, preventive programs and policies need to be developed specifically for this population.

## **Youth Voice**

**The following are quotes that we collected from youth during our extensive outreach. We asked them what New York City schools, communities, and government could do to work more effectively toward solutions to social problems that affect young people ...**

*"Schools should motivate and government should create solutions to some of these problems in communities. This could be after school and enrichment programs for students."*

*"Kids overall seem to not know if there are solutions to their problems and what or who they can talk to about them. It's important because kids have a voice too, but they just don't know..."*

*"The education system in NYC expects everyone to learn and appreciate the same basic ideas over and over. Many kids need mental stimulation in other ways. Because this does not happen, kids cut school and have no hope for the future."*

*"Talk to students about what is going on in the world and how they can avoid these issues."*

*"Have teachers that get to know their students and better after school programs."*

*"Put more effort into and spend more on programs that will effectively educate and encourage positive behaviors."*

*New York City youth should "have regular meetings with public officials about public issues and how to solve them."*

*New York City school, community, and government officials should "care more," "educate people," and promote "teen awareness."*

*"Try harder to understand the youth in every community."*