

HAI's Youth Leadership and Violence Prevention Program.

OVERVIEW

Modeled after an HIV/AIDS Prevention approach two and a half years ago, HAI's Youth Leadership and Violence Prevention Program has educated over 8,000 youths across New York City. While HAI works somewhat with public high schools, its main thrust has been with teens who have already entered the juvenile and/or criminal justice systems. Last fall, HAI contracted with the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development to build a program of multi-cultural education, conflict resolution training, peer counseling, and special youth projects for youths in Community District #4.

PROGRAM GOALS

The primary goals of the program are to help urban youths look at potentially violent situations, to realize how they may depend on violence to boost their self images, to understand how this can be self-destructive and to examine alternatives through developing leadership skills.

PROGRAM METHODS

Each program series includes about 15 sessions conducted by one of HAI's professional facilitators and two peer educators, all trained in the use of interactive theater techniques which educate youths on issues like conflict resolution, cultural diversity, and leadership skills. Near the end of the series, youth participants take on more responsibility through creating their own final leadership presentation performed for their peers.

PROGRAM TESTIMONIES

Writes one youth participant:

Your working with us over the eight week period brought out real hidden talents in many of us and gave us a chance to tell our candid stories through drama..The Hospital Audiences program was very fun and I really enjoyed working with professional actors. Being involved with this program in Spofford, I feel was a new and very great experience for me. It also helped me realize a lot of mistakes I made in my life which I feel now that I've actually analyzed them, I won't make again. And I hope programs like this will continue going on because I really like acting...Your dedication to our group achieved no small feat and we hope you will continue to inspire the young minds of the city, and, in so doing, make this world a better place.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. How critical are programs to combat violence in U.S. and some other societies?
2. What features of this program seem to make sense to you? Which might be copied in other kinds of youth programs?

IMPLICATIONS

1. This program, while not a panacea for urban youth violence, is a crucial starting point for violence

prevention.

2. By facilitating discussions and workshops on conflict resolution, cultural diversity, and youth leaderships, urban young people (whether previously involved in violence or not) can be empowered to handle the common potentially violent situations they encounter, to respect the cornucopia of different cultures represented by city youths, and to lead others to do the same.

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