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Seneca County Students Work to Improve the Community

The United Way of Seneca County in partnership with the ACT for Youth initiative works to empower and encourage youth to share with adults their concerns and ideas for a better tomorrow. In July nine high school interns were hired by the United Way to work for four weeks. Paid for entirely through the ACT for Youth grant, which is funded by the New York State Department of Health, these nine interns were asked to research, analyze and report on statistics, surveys, and other local data that was presented to them about our community. The youth chose to focus on what they found to be the most prevalent issues in their schools, homes, and communities. The areas they focused on were the local economy, cliques/hatred, sex in high school, substance abuse, neglect, and surroundings. The students found that the common cause for problems that teens face was boredom. They explained that particularly in the south county where there are no community centers, there is not much for teens to do, so they often turn to drugs or alcohol. The students from Romulus and South Seneca came up with solutions that could help combat boredom in each of their communities. Romulus students hope to start a

non-for-profit pizzeria shop, one in which students could shadow adults and acquire hands-on experience in starting and operating a business. The pizzeria shop would also provide jobs for teens and give them a place to go after school. South Seneca students came up with the idea of starting a Big Brother/Big Sister type program at their school. Through their research and discussions they decided it was important to focus on the younger generation (K-7th grade) and to provide them with positive role models from their high school. This would also open up volunteer opportunities for older students and give them something meaningful to do.

In an attempt to bridge misunderstandings and sometimes difficult communication between youth and adults, multigenerational projects aim to alleviate some of these problems. Methods that may appear to be alternate choices to what has been “tried and true” are actually useful as today’s teens are not the same as what they were 20, 10 or even 5 years ago. The social influences upon them have evolved in many ways that are not all positive. For many reasons youth remain a mystery to most adults. Such projects as those designed by the interns are one example of how youth can engage in a meaningful project within their community that will serve many people.

The United Way interns presented their ideas to the *Seneca County Partners for Children, Youth and Families- Collaboration for Community Change*, and it was very well received. Romulus students are in the process of securing funding for their pizzeria shop. The Surge After School program at South Seneca high school is planning on starting a Big Brother/Big Sister type program this year. The United Way of Seneca County will continue to work with the nine interns throughout the school year to create real, lasting change in our communities.