

Confronting Concerns: May 12, 2007 - Session #2



The second workshop of the Confronting Concerns program focused on examining the ways that the concerns highlighted from the interviews affected young people on a personal basis. The workshop began with a name game and an exercise called the human knot. The purpose of these activities was to get the students warmed up and a bit more familiar with one another. After the introductory activities-- the participants did a walking brainstorm.

Through the walking brainstorm, participants were able to record their thoughts about how particular concerns affected young people and what young people could do to make changes. Some of the concerns brought up in the walking brainstorm were sex, violence, the environment and racism.

The dialogue after the walking brainstorm went on for quite some time, because students were really interested in discussing the issues that were raised. In the discussion about sex, participants highlighted that media images often encourage young people to take part in behaviors they are not ready for. Also, we discussed the fact that teens needed more safe spaces to talk about sex where they would be respected and not judged. In the discussion about the environment, many participants noted that health and the environment were connected-- especially when it comes to the asthma rate in Harlem. Some of the adults added that the asthma rate in East Harlem is very high, and much of that is due to environmental causes such as living close to a highway and waste dumping sites. Also, the discussion on violence highlighted the fact that many youth do not have positive influences such as after school programs or caring adults in their lives, and that can lead to them participating in violence in the neighborhood. Some of the younger participants debated about whether or not TV, radio and video games affected the way young people viewed violence-- some agreed that it did, while others disagreed.

The last activity for the day was a bit rushed because of the length and depth of the walking brainstorm discussion. Participants were asked to split up into two small groups to do the next activity. They then had to create neighborhood blueprints in which they would include places in the neighborhood they considered safe for young people and places that were dangerous for youth as well. While the groups began the project and began to identify both safe and not safe spaces in their community, the activity was cut short because of time and groups were not able to fully present what they had done to the larger group.

Overall the workshop went well, and there was great feedback from both the youth and the adult participants. 90% of the participants enjoyed the workshop while only 10% said that they did not enjoy it much. Participants said that they learned about a lot of topics such as peer pressure, violence, health and racism. Some participants were also able to make connections between many of the issues that the community faces and learned that communication was a good way to begin to address the interrelated issues. Everyone agreed that the workshop should be help again and that it was a good way to help the participants share how they felt and work towards making a change.