

The Connection's Prevention Department Sponsors Fourth Annual Youth at Leadership Conference



Youth from six different Connecticut towns interviewed Hilary Kumnick from the Killingworth Lions Club. Mr. Kumnick was one of 10 statewide sector representatives who participated in the LEAD conference.

Eighty people, including high-school aged youth and a cadre of adults from eight towns across Connecticut including Clinton, Durham/Middlefield, East Haven, Guilford, Madison, New Haven, Old Saybrook, and Westbrook, gathered at the Clinton Town Hall on June 27, 2014 for the fourth annual **Leadership Encourages Asset Development (LEAD) Conference 2014**. This year's theme, "Finding and Using Your Voice," featured activities that explored coalition building, youth perspectives on decision making, and how adult leaders can express value to youth in their communities.

In the morning, teams comprised of youth from different towns were formed in an intentional effort to give the young participants an opportunity to work with people they didn't already know. Each team was then told that they would spend the morning engaged in a "Human Scavenger Hunt." Armed with clues, maps, and four questions, the teams were sent out into the town of Clinton to find adults representing many of the sectors that gather to form community coalitions. When the participating adults, who had been stationed in or around different buildings in the Clinton municipal district were discovered by the youth teams, they were asked the following questions:

1. What is your role in the community? 2. Are youth involved at all in the sector you represent and how? 3. How does your sector value youth in the community? 4. Share a pearl of wisdom (something you wish you'd known as a teen). At the end of the interview, adult participants gave the team a puzzle piece with the name of the sector the adult interviewee represented. This year's "finds" included a teacher, reporter, youth services specialist, doctor, parent, pastor, civic group representative, a senator, community health liaison, and a policeman, all from various towns. When the groups reconvened at the Town Hall, and put the puzzle together, they discovered that one sector was missing: the **Youth Sector!**

After a discussion on what they had learned about the sectors of a coalition, and how youth can be involved in decisions made in their towns, participants formed two large groups that explored decision-making, opinion-forming and communication activities. At the end of the day the original, smaller teams gathered to discuss such topics as marijuana use, underage drinking, social media, relationships, and health topics.

Facilitators for the LEAD conference included Robin Callahan, representing The Connection's Prevention Services program; Mary Varunes, Town of East Haven Youth Services Commissioner and a member of East Haven PRYD Coalition; Stephen Driffin, Sector Leader and Youth Services Specialist, City of New Haven; Tomi Veale, Coordinator, City of New Haven Youth@Work; and Gwendolyn Williams, Program Manager, City of New Haven Youth@Work. At this time, the The Connection's Prevention Department has coalitions in New Haven, East Haven and Guilford.

The City of New Haven, which participated in the conference for the first time this year, will likely host next year's LEAD 2015 conference. The plan is to include other regional towns in the region, including Hamden, Middletown, the Naugatuck River Valley towns of Seymour, Shelton, and Derby. The planning process is being led by The Connection's Prevention Manager Simone Powell, The Connection's Prevention Coordinator Robin Callahan, Tomi Veale and Steve Driffin of the City of New Haven. Next year's themes will include cultural diversity and "thinking outside the box."

Funding to support the youth was provided by the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS); Greater Valley Substance Abuse Action Council (VSAAC) and also the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services (SAMHSA) (2014) Town Hall Meetings.

—Robin McNally Callahan