

Promising Practices: The Hampton, VA Youth Commission

Challenge

For many years, the problems of youth have been discussed across America and millions of dollars has been spent trying to fix youth and their problems. Unfortunately, this approach has not motivated communities to look for positive ways to help all young people succeed.

After surveying over a half-million youth in over 650 cities and towns across America, the Search Institute found that young people have an average of only 19 of the 40 assets. In Hampton, Virginia, 1,300 public and private school 8th to 12th graders were surveyed and the youth reported 18.1 assets.

For Hampton to meet their goal to become one of America's most livable cities, an average number of assets would not be good enough—it is important for every young person to have the opportunity to become a capable, caring, and productive citizen.

Program Description

The objective of The Hampton Youth Commission (HYC) is to include the youth perspective in governing. Through this representative Commission, Hampton's youth can have a formal role in the city's decision making, address issues that affect youth and work together on ideas for community change.

It began in 1997 under the leadership of the Hampton Coalition for Youth. In three and one-half years of existence, the HYC has worked diligently to give youth a voice and real power to positively influence and shape the future of Hampton.

The HYC is a diverse and dynamic group of 20 or more high school youth representing public and private schools. Members are selected by interview and pledge to serve as the voice of their peers in Hampton and meet throughout the school year. Any young person or adult can attend and speak. If the Commission cannot directly address a concern, they make every effort to connect with community resources that can.

The Hampton Youth Commission begins each year with a retreat in which Commissioners receive the knowledge, skills, abilities, and confidence they need to be successful in their new roles. The retreat is also the opportunity for Commissioners to adopt their goals for the year and identify strategies to accomplish them.

The Goals of HYC:

- Provide a powerful youth voice for the city of Hampton

- Champion the Youth Component of the city's Comprehensive Plan
- Appropriate funds to youth initiatives through the grant program, JUMP
- Maintain an effective, efficient, and youth-friendly organization

HYC Grant Program

Every year, HYC awards thousands of dollars to youth initiatives in Hampton. The Youth Commission Grant program ensures a funding source for youth-led initiatives and provides young people the authority to allocate the money themselves. With a City Council approved budget of \$45,000, this program seeks to fund new innovative projects that are created for youth by youth.

The request for proposals usually draws up to 30 applicants requesting funds of up to \$100,000. The Appropriations Committee reviews applications, conducts follow up interviews with applicants, and after intense review, make recommendations to the full Commission.

Once a group receives a grant from HYC, Commissioners conduct site visits to monitor the project's success and keep track of the numbers of young people who benefit from the funded projects each year.

Youth Component of the Hampton 2020 Comprehensive Plan

Each year, the HYC develops recommendations to address the four PRIORITY AREAS of the Youth Component of the Hampton Comprehensive Plan:

1. Caring Relationships
This topic is about relationships in the community that have an impact on youth: Increase the positive interactions youth have in the community.
2. Youth Space
This topic is about places to go and things to do: Make sure those places are youth-friendly and accessible to young people.
3. Employment
This topic is about the employment opportunities available for teens: Make sure we are prepared for the workforce of the future.
4. Transportation
This topic is about how young people get from place to place: Make sure the transportation system is youth-friendly and accessible to youth.

Results

- Rewrote the city's bicycle ordinance and assisted in the development of a city-wide bikeway system
- Awarded over \$40,000 each year to youth initiatives
- Placed commission representatives on city boards, adult commissions, and advisory groups including Parks & Recreation Advisory Board, Superintendent's Advisory Group, and Neighborhood Commissions
- Recruited hundreds of youth to attend public forums on various topics
- Developed recommendations on youth space, transportation, employment, and community interaction to various policy-making groups
- Created a Peer Exchange Program with the city of Indianapolis
- Helped train and support hundreds of youth and adults each year to work in partnership to improve their schools, neighborhoods, and communities

Target

- Youth in grades 9th – 12th who represent the diversity of the city
- All public and independent high schools
- Ten neighborhood districts

Organization

Hampton Coalition for Youth
22 Lincoln Street
Hampton, Virginia 23669
757-728-3280

http://www.hampton.va.us/foryouth/youth_commission.html#

Organization Description

The Coalition for Youth is the coordinating, planning, and catalyst organization for youth issues in Hampton. All activities are guided by teams of staff, city departments, and both youth and adult citizens. The Hampton Coalition for Youth was formed by the City Council in 1990 to ensure that the city's young people would successfully become the workforce and community leaders of the 21st century. Following a strategic planning process with extensive youth and adult participation, the coalition developed a plan of action focused on four critical issues:

1. Support strong families (implemented by Healthy Families Partnership)
2. Build healthy neighborhoods (implemented by Healthy Neighborhoods Initiative)
3. Create a system of positive youth development and engagement (implemented by Alternatives, Inc.)
4. Ensure an ongoing community-wide commitment to youth (implemented by Coalition for Youth)

This strategic plan continues as the "youth agenda" for the city. New issues such as after-school programming and workforce development are added as new needs arise. The Coalition continues to serve as the coordinating, planning, and catalyst organization for youth issues.

The Mobilization for Youth - This citywide initiative creates a foundation for the healthy development of all youth by ensuring that Hampton has the necessary services, supports, and opportunities for youth success. The core of this initiative is the Developmental Assets Campaign that involves the entire community in providing the "assets" or building blocks all children need. The campaign supports the major youth-serving systems in making a shift to an asset approach. It also offers many opportunities for volunteer involvement and partnerships with neighborhoods, businesses, schools, and places of worship. Speakers are available to present to community groups and a newsletter and materials are provided on how parents, youth, neighbors, schools, businesses, and places of worship can participate.

The Youth Commission - This board of 20 youth members serves as a "youth voice" for the city. They identify and promote youth issues, provide input into city planning and decision making, and appropriate funding annually for youth activities developed by youth.

Youth Are Resources/Youth Civic Engagement System - This comprehensive city-wide initiative develops young people as community leaders and prepares community members to work in youth/adult partnerships within neighborhoods, schools, and organizations. Leadership groups are organized in each secondary school and neighborhood district to address important issues, and citywide projects are identified to tackle youth concerns. Leadership and staff support for this project are provided by Alternatives, Inc. Over 700 youth are involved.

Youth In Government - City departments are encouraged and supported to involve young people in meaningful roles within city government. Over 100 youth serve as paid staff, interns, or volunteers in 12 departments from Public Works to Police. All youth serving in city government are honored at the end of the year by the Mayor and other city officials.

A Profile of Hampton's Youth - Ongoing data collection explores the conditions for young people in Hampton. Recent data includes a survey of "youth space" with over 1,100 teens and the survey of developmental assets conducted with 1,300 youth in cooperation with the Search Institute.

Support for Youth-Serving Organizations - The Coalition provides ongoing information and technical assistance for youth-serving groups and organizations. It supports them in identifying best practices for youth development. Anyone can be placed on the mailing list to receive updated information. As a sponsor of the BEST Initiative, the Coalition helps to support an extensive training and certification program for youth workers.