

America's Promise Regional Forum; Houston, TX; June 14-15, 2007

America's Promise ("100 Best Communities for Youth") invited us to present our Teen Court program at the forum as an example of how Los Alamos provides young people with Opportunities to Help Others. Some innovative ideas & suggestions from other communities:

- ❖ Several speakers pointed out that labeling programs as prevention or for "at risk" youth narrows the pool and discourages participation. They encouraged programs to be made universally available and not targeted. They suggested that showing you are in need or in trouble in order to request services undermines family confidence and discourages participation, and the goal in developing programs to keep kids safe, prevent drug use, develop competencies, and help them stay in school should be to get services to as many families as possible.
- ❖ The Mayor of Houston touted the development of new skateboard parks as a major accomplishment for the youth in their county. Through grants from Kaboom, county funding, and fundraising efforts, they've built 5 new parks in the last 3 years and are in the process of building a \$2.5 million dollar park in downtown Houston. Mayor White considers the skateparks a valuable investment because they show they kids that the county cares enough about them to provide a safe and fun place for the kids to do what they want to do.
- ❖ "Project Success Counselors"  
High school freshman are divided into groups (*communities*) of about 10 that meet weekly with these adults. The "counselors" are volunteers that receive a stipend for the year of participation. They organize activities and counsel students on study habits, exam preparation, and goal setting. Funded through Drug Free Schools grant money.
- ❖ "Civic Transcripts"  
Students are encouraged to record and track the completion of community service activities. Incentives for reaching milestones are provided, and the school district and local employers are coached/encouraged to ask teens for these transcripts. Develop a set of identified activities that kids can do on their own (e.g. earning Eagle Scout badges) and set up a system for triggering rewards as accomplishments are documented. This gives kids training in becoming good citizens, promotes the development of assets, and recognizes them for positive use of their time and energy.
- ❖ "Youth *Parole Officers*"  
Not to be confused with JPPOs! This is a teen mentor program that benefits both the mentors and the youth in need of assistance. These teen mentors are selected from groups such as Natural Helpers and Youth Leadership and are assigned to youth. Can be connected to guidance counselors, substance abuse counselors, or traditional juvenile probation officers. The mentor meets with the youth on a regular basis to check in on how things are going and direct him/her to resources as appropriate.
- ❖ "Art Cars"  
Old cars are purchased each year and adopted by groups. The groups decide on themes or designs for their cars, and spend the year modifying their cars and getting them ready for an art car parade held in the town. This is a non-traditional project that adults & teens can work on together, and that provides a creative outlet for kids that don't participate in "regular" extra-curricular activities like sports or clubs.