

# San Diego Youth Leadership Summits



Students received awards for participation from San Diego Unified School District Superintendent Cindy Marten, on June 1

## The Challenge

- Young people in San Diego are divided across its geography by race, language, and socio-economic status. Because of this, students from under-resourced and well-resourced schools rarely have the opportunity and meet and know one another.
- Students in under-resourced schools rarely have access to the high-quality leadership programming available to students from well-resourced schools, and those from high-income backgrounds often don't know the creative and resilient ways complex challenges are met in low-income communities.
- In order to succeed in college and beyond, students from all backgrounds need the ability to communicate and build relationships and understanding across differences, plan and follow through with collaborative projects, and understand and utilize their own agency within their communities.

## The Philosophy: Leveraging Diverse Resources

- San Diego's entrepreneurial and leadership community is eager to give back. Speakers like patent attorney John Gartman, founder of Reef fashions Fernando Aguerre, and founder of Fashioning Change Adriana Herrera, donated their time, expertise and enthusiasm to this project.
- Involving the next generation of dialogue facilitators makes this program sustainable

and adds community value. Middle schoolers weren't the only ones learning in this program; USD undergraduate and graduate student facilitators improved their capacity to facilitate challenging dialogues with this age group, and provided critical mentoring for participants.

- Engaging with one another to create a community project allows students to learn critical job and college success skills, while building understanding and teamwork among incredibly diverse participants.



## The Strategy

- 40 middle school student participants met at the University of San Diego for three working summits in March, April, and May, and a final, culminating event in June where they presented their work and what they had learned.
- At each summit, students listened to and asked questions of a local entrepreneurial leader, then split into small-groups for facilitated dialogue and collaborative project building. Speakers were recruited by Steve Chapple, of Intellectual Capital, Inc.
- Small group sessions utilized dialogue structures such as go-rounds, participant questions, and personal sharing to encourage students to share deeply and ask questions to gain genuine understanding of one another. These processes were balanced with structures to guide students as they identified community needs, imagined projects, planned and delegated the steps, and followed through.
- University of San Diego students, who were trained and prepared by Public Conversations West, facilitated small groups.
- Students stayed in touch with one another and their facilitators through KidsEcoClub's social media platform.

## The Outcomes and Shift

- Students gained confidence, comfort speaking with others they don't know and in front of groups, and capacity for collaborative project planning and follow through.
- One student began the program incredibly shy and very uncomfortable speaking in the small group. At the last summit she had completed a project with her peers as an active participant, could hardly stop talking about how excited she was to be comfortable speaking her mind, and was the first to volunteer to present the group's project in front of the audience.
- Another student, accustomed to letting others take the lead, didn't participate much in his group's project. At the last minute, the student who had been taking the lead was unable to attend the final summit. Left with a gap in leadership, this student rose to the occasion. He took charge to complete the group's project, involve a participant who had missed one meeting, even helping translate for her, and added his own spin and analysis to the project. He really shone as a leader, and said that he learned the importance of following through with commitments and being a leader from the start.



## **Students Reported:**

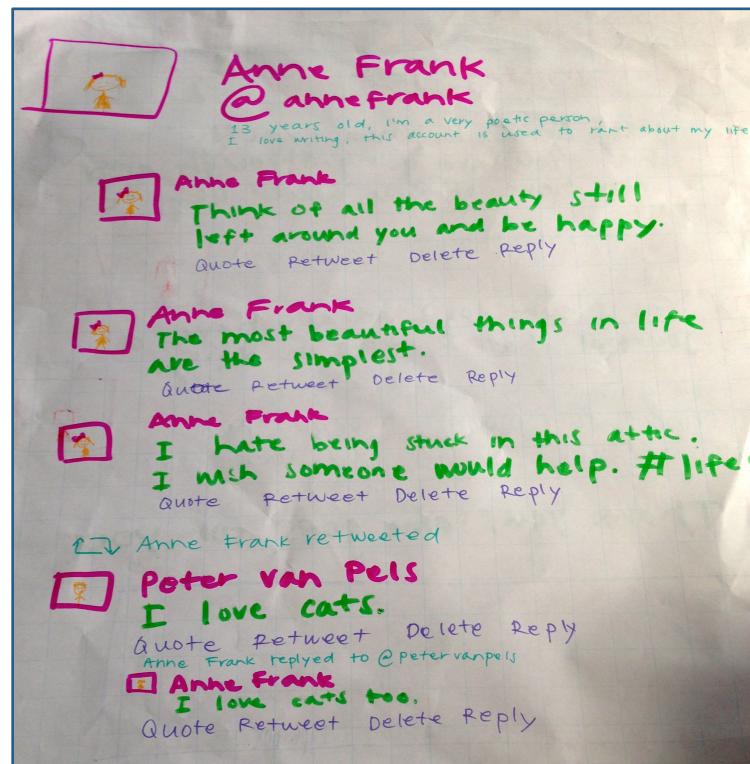
- I have more faith in my communication skills and leadership skills. I want to continue having a position in which I help people by using my leadership skills.
- The best moment for me was realizing that I actually do have the power to make a change and I have accomplished something
- The best moment is when the group agrees on an idea. It's like a big epiphany.
- The best moment is when you get to meet new people and learn lots of things.
- The best moment for me in this program is ending it strong with confidence, learning, and communicating thoughts freely.
- I am going to use it [what I learned] when I go into ASB at my school next year.
- I am going to use what I learned in my life by speaking more with people and getting to share my opinion.
- I am going to be more open with sharing my ideas and less hesitant to follow through with them.
- I am gonna use my leadership skills to help set good examples for others.
- What I learned in this program was how to cooperate and share with people I don't know and my improvement of communication skills.

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## **Student Projects:**

### **The Time Machine**

Participants created a social media time machine, in which students imagined sending social media to the past to see how it would impact history. The students theorized that because of social media's ability to lift up the stories of regular people, the stories of those disenfranchised throughout history would come to light. For example, they presented Anne Frank's Twitter feed and a Facebook conversation during the American Revolution. Their discussions involved identifying whose stories were told and untold throughout history, and how their own identities fit into the historical narrative. The students believed this project could be used to better teach history in schools, in a way that was accessible and relevant for their generation.



### **Understanding Homelessness**

Students learned about and wrote letters to peers at the Monarch School, a local school serving homeless youth. They tackled challenging concepts such as charity and innovation, and grappled with how they could understand and help their peers who struggle to find adequate shelter. Participants planned a field trip with Monarch School students, and learned key project-planning skills in the process.

## ***City Heights Neighborhood Cleanup***

Participants organized a cleanup of the Teralta Park Neighborhood in City Heights on June 8. The students met with the City Council to discuss their event, and formed partnerships with Central Elementary School, Wilson Middle School, City Heights Community Development Corporation, and the Global Institute for Public Strategies. They would advocated for the installation of permanent recycling and trash bins to help keep their community clean.



## ***School-specific Programs***

Young entrepreneurs planned projects to improve each of their schools, including programs to stop bullying and to get much needed school supplies into classrooms in City Heights. Students gained a new understanding of the different challenges facing their schools, and how to tackle these challenges together.

**Student Demographics:** 73% came from Title I schools in City Heights, the other 27% came from well-resourced schools such as La Jolla Country Day and the Bishop's School.

**60% were female. 40% of students identified as Hispanic or Latino, 30% were of European descent, 30% Asian, and 13% African American (Total exceeds 100% because of some students identifying as multi-ethnic)**