

# YVSP Update: Community Forum Report

## *What Matters to You(th)*



*Martin & Heang hand out raffle prizes*

On a rainy night in December, nearly 70 youth and adults from about a dozen organizations gathered in the cafeteria of English High School in JP to meet each other and find out what these young community organizers are all about. Martin Booth ([Project RIGHT](#)) and Heang Ly ([Teen Empowerment](#)) were the MC's. They led us through several interactive exercises that gave the youth many ways to connect with each other. Adults participated mainly as note-takers and facilitators.

### Why we gathered

The purpose of the forum was to:

- Acknowledge youth for their commitment to improving their communities
- Create a safe space for youth to speak about what matters to them and the supports they need as agents of social change
- Connect youth across organizations so they can recognize each other's work and their commitment to their communities

"We really wanted to create a space for young people, especially young people who are really working towards making a difference in their community."

-Heang, MC

### What's the biggest issue youth face?

In one activity called "group ups," participants were asked to gather by the biggest issue that they think youth face. The groups formed around the following themes, which are described by each group's spokesperson:

#### ❖ Violence

"[The biggest issue youth face] is violence because most of the kids now they're joining gangs and there's a lot of gangs having issues with each other. And with the gangs having problems with each other there's a lot of killings and things in the Dorchester community. I think that's why I chose violence."

#### ❖ Peer Pressure

"I believe [peer pressure is the biggest issue] because a lot of kids have low self-esteem and they're looking to be accepted."

#### ❖ Lack of Jobs for Teens

"My group is for lack of teen jobs because we think... the city is constantly refusing to fund us and lack of jobs often lead to greater rates of violence, so really it's just that we need more teen jobs in Boston."

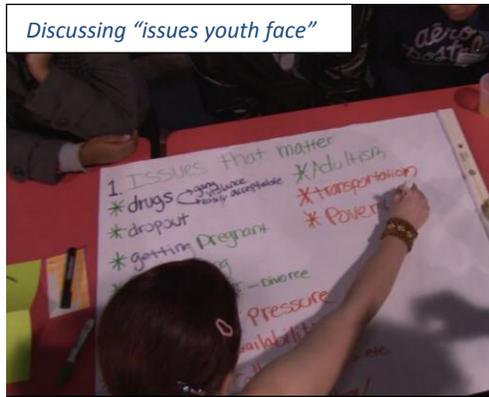


*Speaker for Teen Jobs*

#### ❖ Poverty

"We chose poverty because that's basically... what the youth in our city are conflicted with. We felt like that was a main issue. We felt like all the other issues that people were stating that they sprung from poverty, so that's that."

## Preliminary Observations on Emerging Themes



The heart of the discussion happened during the “moving small groups.” Seated around the cafeteria tables, youth discussed the issues that matter to them, their current community work, obstacles they face, supports they need, and reflected on the forum itself.

After the forum we compiled all the notes taken during that time and searched for themes. There were loads of great comments and ideas around topics like violence, peer pressure, the media, drugs, health, relationships, community activism, etc. Four themes emerged most clearly:

### ➤ **Supports**

There is an overarching impression that the youth do not feel supported in their efforts to positively influence their community.

### ➤ **Peer Pressure**

Youth experience considerable pressure directing them towards unhealthy ways of living (such as drug abuse or gang involvement).

### ➤ **Collaboration**

This theme included three distinct, but not always separable, sub-categories:

- Collaboration between organizations
- Increasing the number of youth involved in community activism
- Youth voice being listened to by authorities (government, organizations, etc.)

The youth felt that “closed-mindedness” was a major obstacle to all types of collaboration.

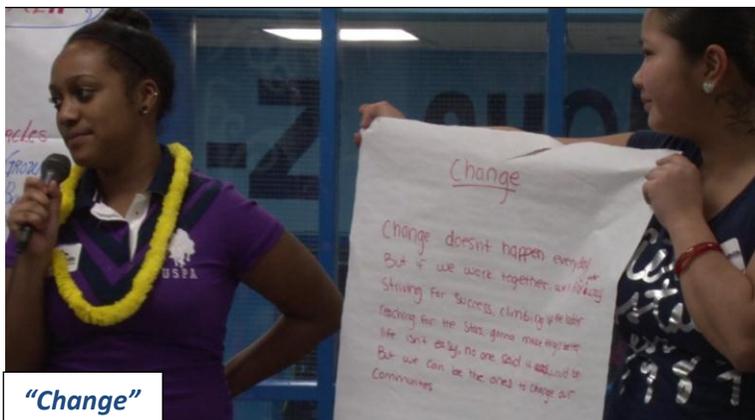
### ➤ **Education**

Deficiencies in the education system are related to many other issues, but particularly jobs, money, and college education.

Have thoughts? [Click here](#) to respond to the themes that emerged from the forum.

## What's next?

The theme of collaboration figured prominently in the conversations about what's next. There was a call from the youth for more opportunities to get together to talk and to work together on shared projects. They would like to involve more youth. We are asking for feedback about these emerging themes from the youth and others. These responses to what was learned at the forum will determine what happens next.



### **Change**

*Change doesn't happen everyday  
But if we work together,  
we'll find another way.*

*Striving for success,  
climbing up the ladder  
Reaching for the stars,  
gonna make things better.*

*Life isn't easy,  
no one said it would be  
But we can be the ones  
to change our communities.*

### **Announcements**

[Boston Neighborhood Network](#) was there filming at the forum. They will air a piece about it sometime in late March. We'll let you know when we have the details.