

Youth Leadership program gives troubled teenagers a voice.

Training Teens to Be Toastmasters

Do you want to make a difference? You can do so by using the skills you've learned at Toastmasters to help teenagers become the leaders of tomorrow.

I know, because last summer I participated in the Toastmasters Youth Leadership Program. Rich Aubin and I – who are both members of Tamalpais Toastmasters in San Rafael, California – led the program for Kaiser Permanente. The health care organization includes the Toastmasters project annually as part of its two-month summer internship program for underserved high school students in Northern California.

The Youth Leadership program is one where Toastmasters like you and me can help young people with their public speaking and communication skills. And the impact can be enormous. Becoming a

with 500,000 middle school and high school students. Many of the teen-parent speakers gained the confidence to turn their lives around.

That rewarding experience was repeated when I participated in the Toastmasters program last summer. The students in the Kaiser Permanente program – called KP L.A.U.N.C.H. – had been placed in internships to get them acquainted with various careers in the health care field. The Toastmasters sessions lasted one hour each week – for eight weeks.

The Kaiser Permanente coordinators and Toastmasters leaders were amazed by how much the teens' confidence and communication skills had been boosted with just those eight sessions.

Here are some reasons for the dramatic improvement:

deal gone wrong – with gun shots fired – and yet another discussed being pressured into having sex in eighth grade.

Being a speaker gave these teens a voice, an ability to share their opinions and capture their emotions. The Toastmasters leaders – and the Youth Leadership program participants – realized that the teens were solving problems for themselves as they spoke. By sharing their lives and challenges, the teens were able to move forward instead of remaining the victim they were describing in their stories.

Self-Confidence

To be able to give a speech in front of an audience is a tremendous accomplishment. All of the KP L.A.U.N.C.H organizers reported that the teens groaned when first told they would be participating in a Toastmasters program. In the end, however, they loved speaking and were excited about their new ability to express themselves in front of a group.

The supportive atmosphere and positive feedback provided the nurturing each participant needed in order to take the “speaking in front of an audience” risk. Their self-confidence was visible to all. They were validated and empowered – and they trusted themselves.

One teen told of “arriving from the rice fields in Southeast Asia to a new life in San Jose”; another talked of “how to kill a shark”; and yet

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speaker can be a life-changing event for teenagers. For the last 14 years, I have trained more than 400 young people who are teenage parents. I helped them to speak out on the importance of preventing teen pregnancy.

These young moms and dads have shared their stories about the challenges of being a teen parent

Teens Felt Heard

Teens are often talked to, talked about and marketed to, but how often are they listened to? By being speakers, it gave them an audience. All the adults were surprised at the personal, and often scary stories the teenagers shared. In my group, one teen talked about suicide, another told of witnessing a drug



another reflected on “how my sister’s suicide changed my life.”

Leadership

To be a leader, a person needs self-confidence, a plan, organized thoughts, and the ability to speak so others will trust and follow. From the various Toastmasters activities, the teens learned such skills:

- Table Topics helped them think on their feet.
- Rotating as Toastmasters officers let them experience leadership responsibilities.

- Evaluating each other helped them develop critical thinking.
- Introducing speakers made them feel important.
- Putting together their speeches helped them develop organizational skills.
- Providing and receiving positive feedback gave them the courage to take risks.

A Crucial Program

As an advocate for teens, I have seen how easy it is to turn them around in a positive way. But they need caring adults to listen to them

and to teach them skills they can use now and in the future.

If your company offers a summer internship program for high school students, please consider conducting the Toastmasters Youth Leadership Program.

You’ll earn the kinds of evaluations we did:

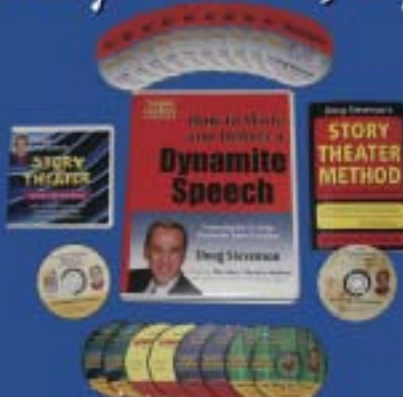
- “This was great!”
- “I’m more confident and energetic and ready to get up and speak.”
- “I can organize my thoughts better now.”
- “These skills I can use all my life.”
- “I had no idea speaking was so much fun!” 🗣️

Carolyn Kellams, ACB, is past president of Tamalpais Toastmasters in San Rafael, California.

Note to Readers: To conduct a Youth Leadership program, order the Youth Leadership Educational Packet (Item 811). This program is in the process of being revised but is still a valuable and fully functioning program. The new Youth Leadership program will not be ready for some time. Meanwhile, the existing program is available and very popular.

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