

ANTI-VIOLENCE YOUTH SUMMIT CONVENES IN OAKLAND SOLUTIONS. HOPE. WORKING TOGETHER FOR A NONVIOLENT SOCIETY.

While very much aware of the human toll and suffering caused by violence in America and throughout the world—especially the rising number of crimes and destruction being committed by juveniles and teens—nearly 700 teen-agers and young adults from throughout Northern California met Aug. 29. Their Anti-Violence Youth Summit was an effort to reverse this alarming trend.

The all-day event was held just across the Bay Bridge from San Francisco, in the hillside city of Oakland, at the Henry J. Kaiser Auditorium, located alongside Oakland's scenic Lake Merritt, in the heart of the city.

Sponsored by the SGI-USA members of San Francisco, the summit also included several other community organizations such as the Oakland Youth Advisory Commission and the West Oakland Violence Prevention Program.

The heart of the summit came when the participants broke up into small groups of about 10 for roundtable dialogues on violence. One group of mostly junior high school students talked about the fears they face each day at school of being harassed by bullies. At another table sat a mother and her teenage son, with the son speaking about his concerns over violence to the group and his mother listening so attentively, as if hearing her child speak for the first time.

And so it went, table after table—discussion, tears, hugs, raw emotion evoked by an issue that affects everyone.

About halfway through the dialogue session, to the delight of those gathered, Oakland Mayor and former California Governor Jerry Brown appeared.

Mayor Brown urged the teens and young adults to take responsibility for helping stop the violence in their schools and communities. Said the mayor: "You have the power to shape your life, the world in which you live. You have even more power when you work together with your parents, your friends and your teachers to come up with solutions to problems.... The power is inside each of you to help bring about the changes you want. It's really up to each of you."

—TOBIE MARSH

Kawika Melendey, Sacramento, Calif., 13 years old (SGI-USA member): "What I learned from this meeting is that if I have a friend who is having trouble in school, I can help. We can talk about the problem. This meeting taught me what passive violence is—that we shouldn't call each other names or tease people."

Ninfa Robles, Vacaville, Calif., 18 years old (guest of an SGI-USA member): "I am happy to see people talking about what we can do to stop violence. Having dialogue is important, because when people start talking with each other, they get to know each other better, and as a result they don't want to do things to hurt each other. It's great seeing so many different people here today getting to know one another."

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Joel Trammel, Fremont, Calif., 17 years old (guest of an SGI-USA member): “I think of myself as a peacekeeper. When my friend told me about this meeting, I immediately wanted to come. It’s been a very meaningful experience for me, because the meeting looked at solutions to the problem of violence. That’s the key. It’s great seeing all these people here today coming together to help solve the problem. That’s the answer: everybody working together.”

Alice Watson, San Jose, Calif., 30 years old (SGI-USA member): “I wanted to be here to make a cause, since I believe so strongly in the concept of cause and effect. If you want to see change, you have make the causes to make those changes happen.

“Being here, learning more about what I can do as an individual to help stop violence, is an important cause that I wanted to make. It is wonderful and really encouraging seeing other groups joining with the SGI in this effort. This is my first experience as an SGI member working with other groups. When you talk with people from other organizations, you realize we all are seeking basically the same things: a peaceful life, where people can get along. I really hope we have more opportunities to work with other groups toward a common goal.”

Katherine Tsang, San Jose, Calif., (SGI-USA member and summit facilitator): “It has been a remarkable experience, seeing these young people open up and share their feelings about violence. There is a real fear of being a victim of violence. Listening to their concerns made me realize how much they need support—from their parents, teachers and religious leaders. Hopefully from today, they will continue the dialogue about how to prevent violent behavior. Many said that because of the summit, they now feel more confident about being able to positively resolve conflicts in their lives. They all expressed a desire that there be more meetings like this.”

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