



2015 Voices of Our Generation

Project overview

PROJECT OVERVIEW

About the project

The 2015 Voices of Our Generation project highlights diverse and authentic experiences of youth in Minneapolis. Their rich perspectives can be used to inform planning and coordination of youth-serving programs. We asked youth about a variety of topics, such as city and community living, social connections, education, mentorship, and adolescent health.

During the fall of 2014, we recruited 43 youth between the ages of 12-21 years old. The vast majority were youth of color who lived in Minneapolis. Three were either employed or received services in the city. We recruited from a variety of youth-serving organizations and programs, including: Asian Media Access, BUILD Leaders, Brian Coyle Center, Connections to Independence (C2i), Hmong International Academy, Migizi Communications, Minneapolis Youth Congress, and Tubman. Youth volunteered to be interviewed and did not receive incentives.

Youth comments were edited for clarity and length.

List of topics

- Changes about the neighborhood
- Desired adult understanding
- Discrimination, racism, and equity
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- Information about things to do in Minneapolis
- Living in Minneapolis
- Messages to the mayor
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- Sexually transmitted disease and HIV information
- Teen pregnancy
- The police and Ferguson, Missouri

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About the project

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Living in Minneapolis

Minneapolis youth were asked, _____

“What do you like about living in Minneapolis?”

_____ They responded,

“Besides having all my friends here, I really like all there is to do around the city. There are so many different places to eat. There are so many different places you can go to hang out with your friends, or activities to do. It’s really bike-friendly, and I really like to bike so it’s no problem. There’s also, besides biking, near where I live, there’s buses to get me place-to-place. Light rail, transit system, as well, so it’s easy to get around. There’s lots of stuff to do. And from my experience, there’s been friendly people.”

“Well to keep us out of trouble, they have a lot of recreational stuff that we can do and a lot of Park Board stuff that we can do.”

“Oh Minneapolis! I like that it’s such a diverse place. You know it’s such a big city. ...You got a taste of everything. I mean you have downtown, where there’s like a big work life, the busy life, and then you have South Minneapolis. ...You got Minnehaha Falls, and it’s really relaxed and kind of touristy. And there’s North, you know, where we do have a lot of problems. ...And then you know Northeast, Uptown, it’s just, you’ve got everything here. You have so much diversity. It’s really amazing, and it’s just a beautiful city!”

“I am a city boy. ...I think there’s a lot of different cultures here. You have the opportunity to learn from that. Different people and how they live. And it’s a growing city. Lots of room for opportunity. Definitely.”

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LIVING IN MINNEAPOLIS

“With Minneapolis, we are small enough where people actually pay attention to the little things, like we have the people [dressed] in green who are constantly picking up the trash or making sure the city looks nice.”

“It’s the first and only place that I know of. Born and raised here. ...I really like the community and the diversity. Like, I see a lot of segregation throughout the city, and a lot of my friends experience it. Me? I’m all over the place. I have friends from all different cultures and backgrounds. So that’s one thing that I like, and, if I was to have kids, that’s one thing, I would raise them in Minneapolis. I think this is a perfect place to raise a family.”

“I like the city in general. I like a lot going on. I like fast-paced stuff. You know, just the energy basically of the city itself. I think a lot of people are kind-hearted that I come across in Minneapolis. Not necessarily everybody, but just how some people act and stuff is really nice compared to other states.”

“[I like] the nature of people’s personalities and how comfortable it is ...[and] all of the lakes and the parks and natural feel of Minneapolis.”

“You know, Minneapolis has all the great resources. Those resources are for when something bad happens – it’s not to prevent it.”

“I was born and raised [here]. I guess I like that a lot of my family is here. It’s a very big population of Natives. I don’t know. That’s what I like about it.”

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Messages to the mayor

Minneapolis youth were asked, _____

“If you and your friends had 3 minutes with Minneapolis Mayor Betsy Hodges, what would be your recommendation about how to make Minneapolis a better and safer place for young people?”

_____ They responded,

“Gang-related stuff. I would change that. I want to take my little sisters to the park or something, instead of having to see people on the corners throwing those gang signs and stuff. ...Mostly at night time, there’s this corner store where, I don’t know, I would say it’s like kind of ghetto, but people still end up selling weed and just all the drugs.”

“[Be] careful [of] what goes in and out, because I know a lot of drugs [that have] been coming in and out, and there’s a lot of dangerous people out there, and I guess inform youth about safety. ...Like downtown, because I know being in high school, you ride city buses to school and home and then you’d like be able to know... how to watch out for predators, because a lot of people do ask you questions when you’re on the bus and try to talk to you.”

“I think you know there’s a lot of attention needs to be put on our education system, mostly how we run it. You know, making it better for students. I want to be engaged. I want to be engaged! I want to have teachers that actually listen or actually teach.”

“We need more activities for kids...like from 3:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m., like afterschool programs, activities like that, because it’s not enough. Like at 3:00, I see kids all the time, around that time, because I live in Minneapolis. So I would talk to her about that.”

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MESSAGES TO THE MAYOR

“Make a recreational center, and put about five recreational centers [around the city], one in the heart of North Minneapolis, and then the other four in different corners. ...At these recreation centers, have all types of resources, like as far as food, clothes, a clinic, therapy, you know, the whole nine yards. Honestly, I feel like most kids don't go to where the resources are, because it's all scattered all over the place, and they don't have bus fare like that. So they're like, 'Dang, I can't get there no way.' ...I already know these are things that we're asking for, because I'm homeless myself. So, it's like I know what kind of resources we need, and we're asking for it, and they're not out there.”

“I think she should open up more leadership programs, and she should talk more about bullying and stuff, and I just want to thank her. ...I also want to talk about society, because they can be really mean sometimes. If you just go to a video and look at the comments, they can be so harsh, and sometimes those comments can change people's thoughts, and it just hurts the person who did the video. And people with diseases or who's poor ... they [should] hire and work with them, just kind of give them a hand. Yeah. Just pull them [along], so they could go on this journey together.”

“I'd tell her about my experience in the community, what I saw and what I've been through and now how I'm here to help. Because I was the problem at first, and now I can be the solution.”

“If I had three minutes with her, I think I would talk about kinda getting youth more involved with the decisions. I mean we have Minneapolis Youth Congress, but there's only so much that we can do. Yeah, getting youth more involved in the decisions, therefore, I think the programs will be better for us, because we designed them.”

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Schools

Minneapolis youth were asked, _____

“If you had a magic wand, what would you change about school?”

_____ They responded,

“I don’t want to get going on the achievement gap, but we do need to address that for sure. That’s kind of crazy that we’re like number one in the country, I think, right? ...[The achievement gap] isn’t a good thing to be number one with.”

“I don’t think the curriculum works, because it’s too close to the brown eye, blue eye experiment. ...I’m not saying have a whole black curriculum or have a whole Hispanic [one], but emphasize a little bit more on their cultures, and let them know that they contribute to modern civilization as well.”

“I’ve been a part of trying to get more African American studies in our history books. ...They’re talking about Dr. Martin Luther King, and Rosa Parks, and stuff like that. But, you know, it’s way bigger than that. Because I went on a Civil Rights research tour, back in the spring, in Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi, Missouri, and Tennessee... and, I feel like if we’re taught what I learned on my trip – I learned more within eight days than I’ve learned in high school, middle school, [and] elementary school about my history. ...A lot of youth started a lot of the Civil Rights movements – actually, a lot of the organizations...to make change and stuff like that. So, I feel like it’d give our youth more hope versus always hearing about these older people who did this or did that.”

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SCHOOLS

“My math teacher, she taught social justice math, which was really cool. ...It was like when the banks gave the ghetto loans and how inequitable that is, and we calculated our own student loan debt when we saw colleges that we wanted to go to, which was scary, but good to know.”

“An average person, all they think they’re going to do is work for the rest of their life, get the money, pay the bills, support their country, [and] the community. It would help [if] we could learn stuff that would help us outside [for] our [daily] lives, you know? It’s a lot of responsibility to think about life decisions after 18, because just last year, you had to ask to use the restroom.”

“I know how to do the Pythagorean Theorem, but I don’t know how to do my taxes.”

“They should teach something about banks, how to manage your money, and all that stuff, so you can know what’s going to happen as you get out of high school.”

“There’s a lot of fights that go on like after school and stuff so, [I’d like to see] a lot of security guards, because a lot of people get bullied after school and things like that. So, something to do with that would be nice.”

“[I would change the] drama and all the judgment towards everybody.”

“[I would change] maybe the kids, how they behave in school. ...Like now, they disrespect teachers.”

“I think I would change up probably just that it doesn’t start so early in the morning.”

“More cultural awareness is a big part of it so [teachers] can try to see eye-to-eye with students in supporting them. ...[Teachers] lose hope after a long time, because some teachers still to this day just don’t understand if they’re not used to teaching certain kids. That’s why relationships with students and teachers, like get pretty messed up, because they don’t come to an understanding.”

“I feel like a lot of teachers don’t necessarily have the connection with the kids. They just have the job. ...With the bigger schools, it is kind of hard. There’s a lot of kids, you know. But it’s just, if they actually took the time out of their day and had a connection and talked to the kids, and, you know, see how they feel...they would see a difference in their grades and stuff.”

“Better school lunches for all schools everywhere. I mean my school lunches are pretty good, but I know a lot of public school lunches are terrible.”

“Schools should be able to have like a food truck every once in a while come to the school and have different varieties of food. I think it’d make a lot of business. The school would make money, the food truck would make money, and the people that go to the school would probably like that idea.”

“So, I feel like if you made the classroom sizes smaller, instead of just separating kids into special ed classes, it would make things better. Like, instead of having ten rambunctious students, you have maybe two or three, where you can – you’d be able to focus more on students who actually want to get the help, and you can actually have a better way, a better system, of disciplining kids.”

“I was in Minneapolis Public Schools and, though I was ahead of my game, I did my homework. I follow the rules or whatever. I was just really lost or nobody really noticed me. I remember one time my teacher – halfway through class – my sixth grade teacher was like, ‘Oh, you’re here? I didn’t even notice you.’ ... Of course, because you have like twenty other people who are yelling and jumping around that you can’t even pay attention to the people who actually want to be here and learn. And it’s just kind of sad and frustrating, because you have the kids like that who actually are here to get their education, and you have those who, I guess, think like it’s daycare.”

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Changes about the neighborhood

Minneapolis youth were asked, _____

“If you had a magic wand, what would you change about your neighborhood? For example, to make it a safer place?”

_____ They responded,

“Like no robberies and stuff. I’d have nearby stores in my neighborhood, and we’d have nice people, and everybody can know each other real good. ...We could have like a party in the neighborhood, and won’t be nothing bad happening, and we’d have fun in whatever we’re doing. We could help each other out if someone’s feeling bad or something.”

“Sometimes we hear gunshots ...And that just kind of frightens my family, and I want my neighborhood to be a safe environment.”

“[I live] in the Phillips area, and that’s sort of a problematic area when it comes to South Minneapolis. I don’t know, [there’s] like a lot of violence, like [it] could be gang-related, but it’s like Natives on other Natives, and that’s not how things should be.”

“The violence and the gang-bangin’, because it’s stupid. Like my generation, some of these kids ain’t got nothing to live for. They just wanna go out there and sell drugs, shoot people for fun, babies [even], and that’s crazy. Seven-year-olds, like, that’s crazy!”

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CHANGES ABOUT THE NEIGHBORHOOD

“The racial tensions...how people feel about Somalians and stuff like that. You know, it's like, do you really understand their culture or life? Back in the day, people used to always talk about, 'Oh yeah, they're taking baths in the bathroom.' It's like, no, they're making wudū, don't you understand? They're going to pray. ...I guess, I just think the racial tensions could be a little bit reduced. But once again, this is America, so...”

“What would I change about my neighborhood? Maybe that people should like – even Somalians or Mexicans – we should all just come at a union. I mean unite, and, like, stand up, because, [with the] times now, people should just get along. ...Even though they different from us, they're still human, because they still deserve the same things from us.”

“What I would change? I mean, it's kind of dirty. People trash it around a lot. It'll be trashy, and, it's just, there'll be garbage cans at the corner of our blocks. But, like, really? Cleaner environment would be nice.”

“My neighborhood? I would say more sense of community. We don't talk with our neighbors, so if we had like a block leader or something... that wouldn't be biased or wouldn't discriminate and would kinda bring everyone together.”

“How people are all closed off with technology. ...Everybody is like in their homes all the time, and, nowadays, there's not a lot of kids at the park, because they're surrounded by technology in their homes.”

“Exposure. More exposure to better things and less negative things.”

“[Have] more of a prevention setting for [young people]. And a place I think they could hang out, like that's their own place. And even a building that they can use, a program down there that they use, organize themselves, and that is youth-based – not the adults running it, it's just them running it. It gives them that power back that has been taken away from them either by the government or the adults in their life. So [letting] them have a place that they can call their hangout.”

“My neighborhood? I would try to change the youth involvement. There's not a lot of us youth bettering our community. There's not a lot of us who have taken a fondness to it. ...Kids that are into violence, you know, getting them into boxing or something. So they can have a healthier way towards it, for transition.”

“I would make it so all fathers are part of their household.”

“I mean there are times when I actually don’t really think there’s much wrong with my neighborhood. ...It’s always little things. Like, ‘Oh, I wish the potholes would be fixed on time,’ or, ‘Oh, I wish we didn’t have too many people blasting their music at four in the morning.’ ...I feel like people like to stereotype North Minneapolis. People like to marginalize us, and make it seem like we’re just so horrible, because the media likes to portray all the bad things that happen over in black communities. But, I mean, in all honesty, let’s think about it. I hear about crime happening over in the suburbs just as much.”

“My neighborhood [is] good, but I’ll probably change the police department, because I feel like they target black people specifically. Like, they already assume that, alright, we got a gun on us, we got drugs on us, oh yeah, we’re part of a gang. We are already profiled. They racially profile us already. So, hopefully, I [can] change that.”

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The police and Ferguson, Missouri

Minneapolis youth were asked, _____

“In your opinion is Minneapolis on track to be another Ferguson, Missouri—referring to what happened to Michael Brown? If yes, what can Minneapolis do to avoid another Ferguson-like incident?”

_____ They responded,

“This is the best question I’ve ever heard. I’m in Minneapolis Police Explorers, so I have one step in one side and one step in the other. I’m in [Youth Congress], which talks about how kids are treated unfairly by the police, but on the other hand, I’m with the police, and I roll with them or whatever. So, I think that, no, we wouldn’t be another Missouri, but I think that in the far future we could be. Because if we don’t start paying attention to police brutality right now, it could get bigger—and especially with the way that they interact with not only youth, but with people of color.”

“No...because it doesn’t really matter about what color you are, it just happened.”

“I don’t think Minneapolis is like that. I mean, I haven’t heard anything. I don’t think Minnesota, period, is like that.”

“Well the majority of my friends and now a majority of my family are white. They’re not black. So I go to a lot of places where the majority is white, and I am treated very, very well. Even if I don’t know these people, they still treat me very well, and they respect me. I just think that’s something that doesn’t happen in Ferguson.”

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THE POLICE AND FERGUSON, MISSOURI

“[What happened in Ferguson] could possibly happen, but every time I see police go to a situation, it’s actually both races there. So I think that’s what’s keeping it good, how it is... like stable. Like a white male and black male, or a black female and white.”

“I wouldn’t say that we are on track to doing that. I think that we are evolving in adult partnerships. ...[Minneapolis Youth Congress] partners with the police department a lot. So I think we’re, you know, giving the adults that are in authority a big picture—[to be] able to look at us in a different way and talk to us before handling a different sort of action.”

“I mean, anywhere, honestly, is [on track to being like Ferguson]. And not even just in America, I feel like. I think a lot of places are on track, because there’s just, there’s a sense of distrust between authority and the people.”

“I was unlawfully detained, and I think it was because Northeast is more of a white neighborhood. I think it was probably because I’m African American or mixed, at least. My mom is white...and I was—I don’t want to say scared necessarily—but it is kind of scary, because it’s like they’re not respecting your rights in that situation.”

“If I don’t have nothing on me, I’m always going to feel like the cops are still going to pull me over and search me for no reason, just because they might have probable cause. But, it’s like, you can’t fight that. How are you going to take a cop to the system? They’re automatically going to believe the cop because of his badge, instead of just me, you know? They’re going to look at that cop: Oh, he has weight under his belt. You know? He saves lives. What have I done? You know? But it’s what the cop thinks I did, is what makes me look bad. And he could take that to the system and fight it all he wants.”

“What I see, for some reason, it’s always Natives. Like, they’re always picking on Natives. This cop almost beat my uncle to death, and now he’s in a wheelchair. He tried to sue, but it didn’t work out. So then, after he tried to sue them, they just been on his butt about it. Like just, ‘you better stay home,’ and just doing all this stupid stuff. I think they would end up doing it here sometime soon.”

“I heard a story of somebody who goes to my school that had some kind of trouble with the police. Like for example, they were playing basketball—and the kid who told me about it, he’s mixed, so like black and white—he said that they were playing basketball—and the police came out armed with tasers. I feel like that’s kind of unnecessary, but there’s definitely something that can be changed like with the selection of who the police are hiring to become new officers.”

“Two weeks ago, I’m walking to the store. It’s raining, right? Alright, so the police, they pull up on me, like, ‘Why you walking outside?’ ‘Well, I’m going to the store.’ They’re like, ‘You got a gun on you?’ I’m like, ‘No.’ It’s like, ‘Have you been arrested?’ I’m like, ‘Yeah, I’ve been arrested before. Like what does that have to do with anything? Why are you arresting me now? Where’s the probable cause? What’s the reason for you stopping me, other than I’m black?’ So they’re like, ‘What’s your name?’ [He spells his name for them.] The whole spiel. They looked it up. ‘So you have, you know, this conviction and everything,’ [they said]. ‘Well, okay, that’s in the past, [as a] juvenile. I’m an adult now.’ So they arrested me and everything, apprehended me. They just drove me around, playing like, ‘You n—, y’all just stupid out here. Y’all think everything supposed to be handed to you. And f— y’all need to work for it.’ I’m like, ‘What? Like what does this have to do with anything? This is your first time meeting me. I don’t know you. I’m going to the store, and you talk about all this.’ ...Really, that’s normal for me now, because we’ve been through that when we were younger too. It’s normal for us, and I was like, alright, they don’t like us. We’re black. We know why they [are] stopping us.”

“They definitely discriminate, just because it’s more common for certain races to be, you know, more violent or whatever they want to say. They profile everybody as if they’re a criminal, and I don’t appreciate that. I’ve been [a] target personally before. Just simply going to a corner store, buying stuff, and the Arab owner thought I was shoplifting, and he created a big scene, called the police. They didn’t even check me, the police, they didn’t check me. They didn’t talk to me. They just manhandled me and picked me up and threw me in the back seat of a police car, literally, and they drove me down to the juvenile center. ... The police didn’t even hear my story, they didn’t hear, and the cameras were broke. It was just, the whole thing was a mess. And I took that to heart, and I felt like they just automatically assumed that it was me, the police, and I would guess because of my color. It doesn’t really matter if I’m mixed. They still classify me as African, or African American. ...I think it will be chaos. I think a lot of people will start to come together, and share their feelings more. And more on negative topics, obviously, and just come together and start riots or start, you know, drama, and I feel like, to be honest, we’re already there. It’s just not as intense as it could be. But yeah, there’s a lot of things that just aren’t fair. I feel like...the police thing is a real big one, and a lot of people are affected by that. I would say any race, to be honest.”

THE POLICE AND FERGUSON, MISSOURI

“Honestly, I have a lot of friends that live in project housing of Little Earth, and they get harassed constantly by the cops. And what can they do to bring that against the cops, you know? And honestly, it’s just more cases of police brutality, police killings, that’s really going to piss a lot of people off in the long run. And it’s not going to play out how the cops think they’re doing it. Like if the cops think they terrorize enough people, it will keep them in check—no. If the cops do better things for the community, ...instead of being a security there, looking fearless and tough. Why don’t you smile and, say, high-five to the runners, or something? People who are actually doing something positive, why don’t you be a part of that? In your uniform. So people say, ‘Oh, cops are actually doing something good.’ But if the cops are just presented as a tough, fearless, aggressive, criminal-stopping organization, you know? To me, what they are now—today—is an organized gang. They terrorize civilians. That’s my opinion.”

“I feel like [the police] need to get more out in the streets. ...Not walking around the streets like, ‘Oh, I’m tough, I’m a police officer,’ but walking around the streets [and] to the parks like, ‘Did you guys see anything today? Is there anything you’re worried about? Are you worried about going home? Is there anything going on at home?’ Be friendly to the community, you know? And if they get out there on the streets and actually find out what’s going on, then they could crack down on where the most drugs are or where the most guns are, because that’s the biggest thing right now.”

“Sometimes you hear the police say, ‘I go to war every time I go to the Minneapolis area.’ But then you’ll hear young people say, ‘I’m going to war every time I step foot out of my house.’ ...[This one girl] was like, ‘We [are] walking a block to my bus stop, and it’s me protecting myself from not getting killed or raped, because of the neighborhood I live in. So we’re in the same boat together. You just have a badge that people can make a parade for you when you get shot.’”

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Discrimination, racism, and equity

General comments

“Focus on the lower class, because that’s where the problems really start...because you give the lower class an environment to try to start a better life for themselves, instead of making the higher class more power[ful]. ...Let’s say a gang member, all he knows is the streets at a young age—and then all the sudden, his aunt or uncle is involved in the city. She says, ‘If you do this program, and you do it long enough...then everything else will just fall in place.’ They’ll want to do more legal stuff, get more legal money, instead of doing illegal stuff and getting illegal money.”

“I feel like when I say it’s hidden, I feel it’s more like they’re not going to be blunt about it...but they would talk about someone behind their back, and they wouldn’t be all out there. It would be more like a hidden kind of thing. It’s not like someone just coming out like, ‘I don’t like you because you’re black.’ ...Their actions showed that they don’t like you because of the color of your skin.”

“I used to be a kid who was sagging my pants, all thuggish, thinking that stuff was cool and people really didn’t want to associate themselves with me. But then as I changed my behavior, got more mature and conscious of who I am and what other people think of me. I still got that tension, even from people who didn’t see me from the past. ...I have to open my mouth and get to talking to them to really get them to know that I’m not the stereotypical black male. I talked to them about, oh yeah, John Lennon, cool. You know? Things like that. And then that’s when people start to talk to me more, because I let them know that I understand. I know a little of their culture, too.”

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“I feel people like to stereotype North Minneapolis. People like to marginalize us, and make it seem [like] we’re just so horrible, because the media likes to portray all the bad things that happen over in black communities. But, I mean, in all honesty, let’s think about it. I hear about crime happening over in the suburbs just as much.”

“If you keep oppressing and keep pushing these young people down, they’re going to retaliate, and you don’t want to see how they’ll do it.”

“Someone called me a n— when I was going to school. A lot of people act this way.”

“I see a lot of segregation throughout the city, and a lot of my friends experience it.”

“To some people, like Muslims, some kids, they make fun of their—is it like a hijab—or their scarf that they wear on their heads.”

“I feel like a lot of schools don’t necessarily understand that kids don’t all learn in the same way. They learn in different ways, and they’re slowly—but I don’t feel like quickly—catching on to that as much as they could. As long as you get the right answer, if you do it a different process, or a different way, then that’s okay. But a lot of schools, they want you to do it their way. ...Or they’ll dumb you down and think you don’t know what you’re talking about. ... There’s just different ways you have to go about it, but that doesn’t necessarily mean you’re disabled or, you know, they just treat you in some ways like, not equal to the other kids. I was in special ed growing up—is what I’m mainly talking about. And I feel like people, not all people treat me the same as other kids. ...It would be nice if they connected with kids in different ways. ...It would [make] a difference in, you know, their grades and stuff.”

“There’s a lot of anger even though there’s a personality of people in Minneapolis being very polite and open-minded, but sometimes people are so stressed out from the community and all the stuff that they have to do that it overwhelms them.”

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Information about things to do in Minneapolis

Minneapolis youth were asked, _____

“How do you and your friends find out about events, programs and cool things to do in Minneapolis?”

_____ They responded,

“Facebook, mostly. You know, I don’t think young adults really read the newspaper, so, the only way news or information is actually brought to us is through social media. Whenever I hear about something, it’s either word of mouth or Facebook.”

“Mostly Facebook, that’s our big one. Then you’ve got the youth outreach workers that kind of tell [us] about certain events. Most of all of our information comes from online. ...In the teenage group, we all work a lot, so we don’t either have time for it, or we don’t know about it because we’re working. A lot of our information comes from social media.”

“Snapchat. So Snapchat has like a little Snapchat Story...they’ll record themselves, or take a picture of something that’s interesting to them, put it on their Story, and everybody...just scroll[s] through. ...What Snapchat’ll do is it’ll get a bunch of videos from an event, and then...put them together, and then put them in a local place where they might find interesting. Like football games, you know. If you see a football game on Snapchat in the area—and it might be cool, you know—then you might want to go.”

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INFORMATION ABOUT THINGS TO DO IN MINNEAPOLIS

“So I think school is the biggest thing. Like sports—you hear some stuff about sports, about what’s going on around. Metro Transit—when they put up ads definitely, because we all take the train, the bus. Extracurriculars, I think—because sometimes schools are uptight about who comes in and tells kids what to go to. ...Sometimes teachers too.”

“Well, we come here to Migizi Communications. We do a lot of schoolwork activities here, and so whenever something big is going on, they always know. They always tell us—students and non-students—to tell friends, and friends will tell friends. So that’s usually how it goes.”

“I try to stay involved with the community and stuff—as far as events that’s going on and stuff like that. Like, through MAD DADS. And I see a lot of postings around—you know, on random walls and stuff. And then at the Eatery Avenue—over there by Emerge—they have fliers and posters of events and stuff like that. And Emerge, they have a billboard or stuff that’s going on. And then, just Facebook. ... Sometimes I just walk past and see a random something, or a random event going on. Like, oh what’s this? And then go.”

“Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram—I would say are the top ones. Right now, but they’re always coming out with new ones. ...I don’t really talk to a whole lot of teenagers. I—to be honest—communicate with more older people, more adults and stuff. I have a few friends, but in the city word of mouth is the biggest way things get around. Everybody knows each other, and if they don’t know you, they know somebody you’re related to, or a friend of the family, and everything just kind of goes around, and you kind of just hear about it, or you overhear something on the bus or posts on Facebook.”

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Teen pregnancy

Minneapolis youth were asked, _____

“Do you know someone who became pregnant as a teenager? What happened when she found out? What kinds of support were helpful to her?”

_____ They responded,

“To some it’s an eye opener and like a wakeup call. Okay, I’m about to have a baby. This is real now. It’s no playtime. It’s—this is my kid getting ready to come into this world, and I have to get myself together and, you know, get all my priorities straight for my child. And then [for] some [it’s] like, real stressful. And then, it’s like, oh, what am I going do? Not working. Wasn’t planning on this happening. Can’t get a job. My mom might kick me out, so where am I gonna live? I don’t know how my family gonna take it. I don’t know how everybody’s gonna [take it]. So then it’d be stressful at the same time. And then, once the baby comes...some parents... it’s like, oh I’m back to my partying, back to doing this, back to doing that. And not really giving enough time to the kid. And, as far as with the fathers and stuff like that, some don’t really take responsibility, especially with it being such a fast-paced generation. They don’t want to sit down and take responsibility for their actions and stuff like that, which can basically lead to destruction for the child if the mom and the dad is not on the steady, you know? And then, with the single parents, it’s even harder for them. Being a teen, trying to go to school, take care of the baby. I ain’t got no kids, so I don’t know.”

“When she found out...she just kinda disappeared in a way. Personally, I don’t know. I know that her friends were really supportive of her. I don’t know about her family. I think we should give pregnant teens more support and less criticism.”

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TEEN PREGNANCY

“A lot of them were, you know, a little afraid and felt like their lives were turned upside down. But most of the teen moms that I know, they kind of turned it around themselves. They’re finishing school or have finished school. They’re looking for apartments. They have jobs. They’re trying to continue going to college and stuff. So they were pretty distraught, but they had the support of their friends. Some of them weren’t really okay with their family, with the situation, but then they worked towards it, and they’re bettering the relationships.”

“I didn’t want her to [have an abortion]. I’m like, ‘Why would you abort my kid?’ I don’t know if it was a son or a girl. Probably would have changed my whole life, because back then I was being reckless and everything. But I changed now. Now, [I’m] doing some positive things. But, yeah, even my girl, she was pregnant at an early age, at the age of like 14, because she was older than me...”

“Well, I know she was scared to tell her mom and she dropped out, because she was afraid of that stigma from other people—like judging her, probably wondering who she’s been with, who got her pregnant and stuff. She don’t wanna be that pregnant girl in school, so she dropped out.”

“If you’re a teen mother, there’s a program called A-GRAD. A-GRAD works with teens and has a separate part that works with teen mothers. And so [teen mothers] have support with A-GRAD. And then the [girl I knew] actually went to a teen mothers school that was in Minneapolis, and so that helped her a lot. ...There’s a lot of programs out there, but it’s, youth are just not aware of it, because the school’s not putting it out there, like, these are places you can go to for support. The schools expect the youth to go to the school counselor, which some youth don’t feel comfortable to go to the counselor.”

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Sexually transmitted disease and HIV information

Minneapolis youth were asked, _____

“Where or how do young people learn about sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) like chlamydia, gonorrhea, and HIV/AIDS?”

_____ They responded,

“Usually health classes. I think sexual education classes, sometimes their parents, but I think a lot of parents leave it up to the schools.”

“School—that’s where I learned it. My parents didn’t teach it to me. A lot of people’s parents don’t teach it to them. The streets—just hearing about it from other people catching it. Things like that, you know, or the internet.”

“Planned Parenthood. You can hear that anywhere—Planned Parenthood helps. But like, they even have a Pandora station that tells you about that stuff. ...I can go to Planned Parenthood, and, it’s like, they won’t tell my business to anybody.”

“And the clinic [at school] with the sex-ed class really helped a lot. They explained everything, and they don’t really tell your business, and they’re really supportive. They’re just great people.”

“In fifth grade, I learned about it, and after that I moved back to Minneapolis, and I never heard about it again, until I got in trouble [and put in] juvenile [detention], and I learned about it in there. [It was] not in [the] schools here.”

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SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED DISEASE AND HIV INFORMATION

“Personally, I [learned] through STEP-UP. I had a job two years ago at an STD awareness place, and so I pretty much learned every single thing I needed to know about that. I try to educate anyone who has questions about it. Sometimes people make jokes about how something is transmitted, and I’ll tell them, and I’ll laugh with them, but then I’ll tell them how it really goes down or whatever. Since I go to a Catholic school, at my school they don’t really talk about sex very much. So that’s probably a reason why people don’t see it. But I know that in 5th grade and in 7th grade, and I believe in 8th grade, in school we had health class, and so they talked about sexually transmitted diseases. And even through STEP-UP we get a mandatory class where they talk about STDs. Even if you’re not working in that field at all, you still get that education.”

“The streets. That’s how we learn about it, because so many people have it. And that’s the sad thing about it. That’s another thing with my generation. You wouldn’t even understand how many people, once they confide in you and let you know their deepest darkest secret. You don’t understand how many people have said to me, ‘Oh, I’ve had chlamydia,’ or ‘I’ve had gonorrhea,’ or ‘This person has given me herpes,’ you know?”

“We have Red Door. We have TAPP [Teenage Pregnancy and Parenting Program], or TAMS [Teen Age Medical Services], I mean. Well, TAPP is an in-school program, which is really cool too. But TAMS, these kids do have the resources, but they just don’t know about them, because the schools don’t teach them.”

“You know, a lot of the information is kind of common sense. ...Like a lot of things, you already should know. But I feel like some of the important things like recognizing what STDs are out there, and which ones are treatable, and which ones are not is not really taught to us, preventively, or whatever.”

“I want to become a nurse and stuff, and I want to learn about it, but since we don’t really have a lot of time or something [during the school day], then I can’t learn it I guess. ...[My friends] said, ‘We learned it in afterschool,’ and then they said, ‘Why don’t you come afterschool?’ I said, ‘Well, I can’t come afterschool, because I have to watch the kids, my little sister and them...so, I can’t go.’”

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Homophobia and equity for LGBT youth

Minneapolis youth were asked, _____

“If someone your age came out as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT), how would other young people react? For example, how would he or she be treated?”

_____ They responded,

“I don’t notice that much anti-gay [stuff], a lot of people are really acceptive. So, I would like to think that they would be really accepted, and I know a couple people that are gay, and they don’t really get that much for it. I think, overall, it’s a pretty acceptive community.”

“Sometimes, the peers already know that they’re gay. I think the peers are just waiting for them like, ‘Can you just say it already?’ I have a friend who just finally came out, but I’ve known since eighth grade. I’ve been waiting for him just to say it, because we would, like, just go shopping together. I’ve been waiting for him to say it, and then finally we went to Valleyfair with this group—he was there with his boyfriend. I was like, ‘So, does that mean you’re...?’ And he’s like, ‘Yeah.’ So he was like, ‘I just wanted to...’ I was like, ‘I already knew, but thank you for telling me.’”

“Well, someone—a friend of mine—has come out to me. And I was just like, ‘Okay, that’s cool. As long as you’re not acting different towards me.’ Then I’m not acting different towards them. ...If, for instance, it was a girl coming out to be lesbian, I think a lot of her girlfriends would be like, ‘Oh, does that mean you’re coming on to me? Does that mean you like me?’ I think they would react like that. And some people might even just downright not accept it and be like, ‘I can’t be your friend anymore.’”

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HOMOPHOBIA AND EQUITY FOR LGBT YOUTH

“It’d be hard to accept [a gay person] for who they are, and what they stand for when it goes against what you stand for. ...Not with me though. With me I guess, I accept people. I learn to accept people for who they are. Because I know everybody comes from a different background, and you know everybody wasn’t brought up the same. Everybody ain’t cut from the same fabric.”

“On social media and stuff—I mean, it’s really bad, they get called names. They get bullied.”

“They’d be like, ‘Get away from me!’ Like for a gay dude: ‘Get away from me, don’t be by me, don’t talk to me, don’t look my way!’ ...If you’re a girly girl that’s kinda cute, like you’re kinda into that. It’s like a sexual standard—there’s like a double standard thing. We prefer for a girl to be bisexual, because this is more fun for the boy. But a female who’s like a dude, like a tomboy, we’ll be cool to her. We’ll treat her like one of the guys and everything. But talking gay dude to be gay—my people they don’t like it.”

“Well, my sister’s gay, so—once everybody found out, they started to ignore her and not talk to her. And after that she didn’t really have friends.”

“Well, I feel like people would degrade them. People already do it, when people be like, ‘That’s gay!’ and they’re just throwing around like ‘fag’ and stuff like that. So it makes it harder for them to even come out, but when they do come out, it’s like a big shock. Then I feel like people, some of them would get made fun of more, and they can’t be like who they want to be.”

“They would act really bad. Because my friend, he kinda acts gay, but I still accept him as a friend. He’s still like a regular friend to me. It was like the African Americans, they were talking really bad, and they actually made him cry and my other friend, she cried because she’s bisexual and everybody judged her, but then it stopped too. [It] just really hurt seeing your friends cry, and you couldn’t understand how they feel, and you try to put yourself in their shoes, but just, it’s just really hard.”

“[A gay person would be treated] different—not the same as a heterosexual—because sometimes you can’t crack the same jokes. Sometimes you’ll be afraid to say the stuff that you used to say with the same person, because you don’t want to hurt their feelings. But sometimes, not trying to hurt their feelings, you [actually] hurt their feelings—[even with] the intention of not doing bad, you do bad.”

“I know someone in particular who, he’s gay. He’s being badly treated at school, and he’s becoming depressed—and I’m really worried about that.”

“It depends on where they’re from, and where they’re at. ...If you’re talking about someone in the cities, like in Minneapolis, where a lot of people are just more open about their sexuality, you might get some understanding or some acceptance. But, I mean, it depends on the location of this person where they’re coming out, I guess.”

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Role models

Minneapolis youth were asked, _____

“What makes a good role model or someone to look up to, in your opinion? Who are some people either famous or not famous that you or your friends look up to?”

_____ They responded,

“Someone who gives good advice, sets a good example for you—they help you make the best decisions. They’ll help and guide you through life. ...Also, they want you to be successful. They just want the best for you, and they’ll support you and motivate you anyway they can.”

“Someone who stays dedicated to a goal and tries to accomplish that goal, and, if they can’t accomplish it, they understand why they can’t, and they don’t give up. Someone who’s constantly checking on you to see if you’re trying to accomplish your goals, and, you know, helping you accomplish your goals. And probably someone who has the same interests as you, because then you have something to connect on easily.”

“[They] like probably advocate for young people, but not only advocate, teach the young folks to advocate for themselves. That’s a role model to me, because if you teach me something, that’s great. It will stick in my mind for a little bit. But if you actually put me out there to do what you have taught me, I can continue to better the community. I can continue to keep doing it.”

“Just be yourself, man. You don’t fake it. You just practice what you preach. You don’t lie about nothing.”

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ROLE MODELS

“A good role model would probably be somebody that shares similar values as you and who has been able to maintain those values throughout their life without getting influenced by social pressures. That’s something I’m learning a lot. I haven’t really had a lot of male role models in my life. But, I’ve kind of figured out a lot of stuff on my own. My mom’s a really good role model for me, hard-working and just takes care of what needs to be taken care of.”

“Somebody that has been through struggles in life, overcome their struggles, been through mistakes and learned from their mistakes, and is willing to be patient. A mentor has to be patient, because what if you’re working with a youth that isn’t—that’s hearing what you’re saying, but not listening to what you’re saying? They keep making that same mistake over and over again. So you have to figure out a strategy...so should I back off? Or should I go harder? And I feel like there’s a thin line you have to go in between. I’m gonna go hard on you, but at the same time, I’m still backing off.”

“I swear, all the mentors and adults that wanted to see me succeed in life—everything they told me went in one ear and out the other. I didn’t listen to them. But, finally, as I got older, bits and pieces of that information started to process in my head. I’m like, dude, he warned me about this a long time ago—maybe I shouldn’t do it.”

“I know there’s precautions to teachers not getting too familiarized with their students. But sometimes, that’s what the student needs, because everybody else might have given up on them—their family, their friends, their close family, relatives. But if one person is there for you when they don’t have to, outside of school, then it helps just a little bit. And that’s all the little bit you need.”

“She forces me to stay into my studies and stuff like that. ...We just got out of the shelter and she also showed me how you can survive that and also come out in a stronger way. So, I guess it’s because my mom’s like a fighter.”

“Oh, oh yeah, it’s our Liberian president. Ellen Johnson [Sirleaf]. And I like how she takes risks with the gay rights bill. [In the] U.S., they would openly just fight for it. Liberia, that’s harder, because of the way we’re brought up by our traditions. ...She’s fighting for them, for that bill. She counts gay rights as just like human rights. It’s just like the slavery movement. You’re taking away rights from somebody who really needs it—a certain group of people that need rights. ...And there’s been death threats, after death threats, after death threats, and she’s made it.”

“Have you seen *A Bronx Tale*? You haven’t? Well there’s this character named Sonny. He had power, because he lived in his neighborhood for all that time. And he was a mobster. The people smiled in his face, and then say how much they’re afraid of him behind his back. So it’s just like fear and appreciation. And it’s just like—it’s the same side, on the same coin, you know? And it’s just like—you have to appreciate that. You gotta appreciate people smiling in your face, and saying how afraid they are behind your back, you know?”

“Because [my dad] he’s been through a lot, and he’s been through so much sorrow, but he still smiles and supports my brothers and everybody in the family.”

“I look up to my older brother. He’s a huge inspiration to me.”

“I look up to a lot of people. ...I have a lot of role models. Even the ones who’s not doing what they need to do. Like homeless people. I look at, like—I feel like everybody is a role model to me, on the good or bad side. Because, when I look at the homeless, or look at someone who’s out there, been doing bad, still doing bad, and is not trying to change—I look at them as a role model, because it reminds me day-to-day, that that’s not what I want to be. So in a sense, that’s a role model. I look at a role model as a person who will basically show you the way of where you want to go.”

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Desired adult understanding

Minneapolis youth were asked, _____

“What do you wish elders would understand about people your age? For example, the police, teachers, or other adults in your life?”

_____ They responded,

“There’s more pressure now than ever before, and I read somewhere that high school students have as much stress as a person that was admitted to an insane asylum back in the early 1900s. So I don’t know. They might have to fact-check me on that, but I did hear that. I read it. But other than that, we need help understanding those stresses and how we can cope with them. I think they’re inevitable at this point, because expectations for us are very high. We have to do a lot more to get to a place that is as high as somebody 30 years ago.”

“Young people my age are going through a lot—there’s a lot of mental things like depression which is a really big thing...and struggling with faith and what to believe in, your sexuality. A lot of those are big things.”

“I’m guessing kids my age stress out a lot about school and maybe some people even have family problems.”

“We all come from struggles, but it’s not the same struggle. ...I don’t feel like [youth and elders] are fighting for the same things. Back then, they were fighting for equality and this and that. But then again, we’re continuing their fight. Because that’s still going on. It’s just a fight that’s been passed on. But it’s been watered down. Like they watered it down for us, so it’s not as potent. But it’s still there, so we’re still going through that.”

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DESIRED ADULT UNDERSTANDING

“I feel like the generations that are growing up inside the schools are going to be different after they graduate. I feel like there’s going to be a lot more open mindedness to different people and how they’re learning.”

“The majority of my generation is always glued to a screen versus the previous generation didn’t even have cell phones. And so I guess a lot could be said for the attention span of my generation. And I’d like to think it doesn’t affect the decision-making so much, but I know there is a little effect. And that we’re just—because of all the technology and the way people are allowed to share their thoughts and how easy it is for people to access that kind of information—that this generation’s ideals and kind of, like, standards are a little different.”

“We’re a whole other generation. We’re a generation of technology. Technology and instant gratification.”

“I be in my own zone, my own world.”

“It’s important for us to get involved and to know what we can do to help make the world a better place. And—start now, instead of waiting until we’re, you know, having our own lives or starting families.”

“I can’t wait till I grow old. Because I want to see what you guys see.”

“I’m just saying that my generation are the generations of the educated professionals, but we’re also a generation who understands where you come from. But don’t put your past experience on us, because we’re making our own pathway right now.”