



Third Annual Youth Speak Out provides provoking discussion of teenage issues

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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ALTON - The Third Annual **Youth Speak Out** at the Riverbender.com Community Center on Thursday provided deep discussion between youth and community leaders about issues confronting teens today in the Alton area.

The forum was co-sponsored by **Drug Free Alton Coalition** and the **Alton High School Power of Peers**.

Alton students were the moderators of the forum. **Alton Mayor Brant Walker**, **Police Chief Jason Simmons** and **Alton Park and Recreation Director Michael Haynes** also were key contributors with **Godfrey Mayor Mike McCormick**.

Alton Mayor Brant Walker said he believes the Youth Speak Out forum went really well on Thursday.

“There are now some things you see the city working with the school in regard to cleanups and this started three years,” he said. “It is phenomenal to see young people connected and being civic-minded.”

Walker said he surprised at the wide ranges of what the youth thought the percentage of alcohol and drugs was with students.

“Some of those percentages were incredibly high and that is very, very unfortunate and shows there is still work to be done,” he said.

The agenda consisted of discussion from teens in the community and a section on stress in the classroom and alcohol in the home/car. An interesting question and answer period ensued and there was also a networking lunch.

Some discussion occurred with the students on what percentage of area teens they thought were using alcohol or drugs and the responses varied from 30 to about 80 percent, so there wasn't a consistent percentage given.

The Alton High School Power of Peers' mission was explained. The Alton High School Power of Peers is a group of students who have come together to help educate and prevent drug use. The main goal of the group is to educate peers about the effects of underage drinking and illegal drug use. The other main goal is to work with the community to establish a new norm that does not include underage drinking and illegal drug use.

Riverbender.com CEO and Community Center President John Hentrich and his **assistant, Matt Contarino**, passed information out about different Community Center activities on Friday nights. Tonight will be a paintball focus outside and Pinterest will be

the theme of next week's gathering. He answered questions about the teens having a radio station and said there is one in the basement of the Riverbender.com Community Center that is not being utilized.

A textline was suggested to the City of Alton for tips about parties or illegal drug sales. Mayor Walker said the city is looking into such a thing, but the problem is all texts would have to be stored and right now storing them permanently would be a problem. He did say they will continue to study it to see if something can't be established.

"You have to hold texts for years and years and right now storage is a problem," he said. "It is a great idea, we just have to figure out how to do it."

Preventative measures to battle alcohol and drug abuse in teens were discussed. **Some that were suggested were:**

- Checking IDs more often in small stores
- Alton should get a text line for underage parties/drug deal tips
- Mandatory drug/alcohol testing before someone gets his or her license or permit after age 16

Jess Borman, Hazel Denother and Harmony Schallenberg discussed Stress in the Classroom.

Recommendations were made for more low-cost exercise options to relieve stress from a yoga class to cardio or dance classes. Other community stress relief measures were discussed from a book club, coloring/art therapy.

The need for improved community venues and improved advertising for events for teens was recommended, led by **Dajia Robinson** and **Leticia Caruthers**.

Suggested fixes were using some kind of radio station for teens to advertise events. Also it was recommended that teens help with Rock Spring's 2020 project and also there be an effort to have additional indoor concerts at Jacoby or at the Alton Amphitheater for teens to attend along with more events at Gordon Moore Park.

Some revamping of present parks to make them more accessible for teens was also recommended. Bus transportation from the city to Gordon Moore Park was also a brief topic of discussion.

Alton Park and **Rec Director Mike Haynes** said it is a problem for some teens in the city to have proper transportation to Gordon Moore Park. He agreed there could be some revamping of the inner city parks.

“We are in the planning stages of building new softball and possibly new soccer fields in some of the parks within the city,” he said. “We would love to bring teens in to help create those fields.”

Video below:



