



Youth Engagement Program & YWCA to host a community coffee talk

March 19 2018 4:45 PM

ALTON - In honor of National Youth Violence Prevention Week, the Youth Engagement Program (YEP) at Alton High School and the YWCA are co-hosting a “Coffee Talk” on the topic of Youth Violence Prevention on Thursday, March 22 from 6:30 – 8:00 p.m. at the YWCA in Alton.

Alton High Students have been encouraged to write poems or create posters around the theme of Youth Violence Prevention which will be conversation starters at the Coffee Talk. According to Ms. Chloe Moore, Alton High School English Teacher and Faculty sponsor of YEP, “In light of the recent current events, my students and I have been talking about bullying, mental illness, and the tragic shooting that took place in Florida.”

Moore continued, “And the students look forward to having this platform to share their thoughts and feelings.” Joe Whiteside, Alton High Freshman and YEP member remarked, “We felt it was important to give all of the students that wanted to share “a voice”, and so we have also been collecting Youth Violence and Youth Violence Prevention Statements from the student body in class and during lunch.”

The Youth Engagement Program is a project of the Drug Free Alton Coalition and was launched after the organization’s 2016 Youth Speak Out. According to Drug Free Alton’s President and YEP mentor, Greg Gelzinnis, “Our students were looking for places where they could ‘loiter with permission’, where they could host and attend ‘safe events’, and they wanted to feel like the community would take their ideas and suggestions seriously.”

Gelzinnis continued, “I reached out to fellow community colleagues, Ben Golly, owner of Today’s Beauty Supply and Dorothy Hummel, executive director of the YWCA who were of like minds when it comes to our students and the Youth Engagement Program

was launched.” One of YEP’s most successful projects of last spring was the hosting of the first ever High School Mayoral Forum. The students ran the forum and posed questions from students about the mayoral platforms and their role in the city.

Mrs. Hummel remarked, “Working with the YEP students has just been energizing.” She added, “And the topic of Youth Violence Prevention certainly does compliment our mission of Empowering Women and Eliminating Racism and we are very happy to be co-hosts of this event.”

The Coffee Talk is open to the public and community members of all ages are encouraged to attend. Mr. Gelzinnis remarked, “It is so very important that we keep the lines of communication open across our community and do everything that we can to learn from, and better prevent, violent events from happening in the Greater Alton area.

YEP meetings are held every Wednesday during the school year at 3:30 p.m. in room B325. All students are welcome. and if other adults would like to get involved or support the work of the Youth Engagement Program, they can contact Gelzinnis at 618-550-9291