Strive, Struggle, Succeed: 2009 Young Women’s Health Leadership Summit

by Anupriya Dayal

On March 25, 2009, the UCSF National Center of Excellence in Women’s Health (CoE) successfully organized a one-day Young Women’s Health Leadership Summit, entitled “Strive, Struggle, Succeed: Bring Out the Somethin’ in You!” The Summit was a dynamic continuation of the collaboration between the CoE and the San Francisco Unified School District established by six Young Women’s Health Conferences between 2000 and 2006.

This conference was organized by young women for young women as a means to empower their bodies, minds, and souls. The Youth Steering Committee (YSC), a strong group of local girls in partnership with the CoE worked hard from September to March to design, create, organize, and implement the entire summit for San Francisco-based students.

The summit extended an open invitation to share, listen, and empower. The attendees and the young leaders shared their stories, their setbacks, their fears and their successes. The main goal for the Summit was for the participants to take with them inspiration, courage, and a firm belief in the power of all young women to change and improve this world.

One committee member, Connie Xu remarked “The conference is emotional. I am happy to be one of the YSC members.” She, along with the other YSC members, looked forward to the fruits of their efforts in planning and organizing for the past nine months.

Teens and young women from across the San Francisco School District were the proud participants. More than 250 young female students from 20 high schools participated in this summit.

At the beginning of the conference, YSC member Asya, expressed her feelings this way, “I’m nervous and excited at the same time.” Each of the YSC members echoed such feelings as the young and diverse female attendees gathered at the UCSF Mission Bay campus Conference Center at 8:00 that morning.

UCSF CoE Director Dr. Nancy Milliken and SFUSD Superintendent Carlos Garcia welcomed all the participants, thanked the Youth Steering Committee and expressed their hopes for and belief in the potential of the young women in attendance. Congresswoman Jackie Speier, a founder of the original Young Women’s Health Conference, sent a video greeting from Washington DC urging the young women to use their energy and passion to make their families, schools and communities stronger. A panel of students shared their experiences of struggle and shared the ways they overcame difficulties and emerged as strong community leaders. A
number of experts were invited to share ways to control anxiety, depression, and thoughts of suicide or fear of failure.

During the late morning segment of the Summit entitled “Relationship to Self and Others”, a San Francisco based young women’s theater group Glass to Diamonds presented a powerful performance using short pieces of dialogue and poetry to give form to the many feelings in the room.

Near the end of the conference, one of the conference attendees, from Lincoln High described her experience at the conference: “The acting [Glass to Diamonds] was amazingly realistic, and convincing. Their stories touched me and made me realize something.”

Apart from educating girls on how to protect themselves and their health, the summit encouraged young women to find their inspiration to dream high and to pursue their goals with confidence. Near the end of the conference, they were provided the opportunity to brainstorm and ways they could take back what they had learned to others who had not been able to attend the conference. This resulted in many ideas of how to bring about positive change in their schools and communities.

The School District nurse from Lowell High, Maryann Rainey, recapped the conference this way: “I saw how young women were energized to promote healthy messages... This conference effectively helped young women select important topics and lively strategies to get the messages out, such as domestic violence message.” Such issues were brought up and thoroughly discussed by the participants who brought up stories of their own as well discussing recent pop culture and the case of Rihanna and Chris Brown.

Activist Lateefah Simon summed up the day’s event when she ended her uplifting speech with these inspiring words: “Ain’t no power like the power of young women because your power never stops.”

The Youth Steering Committee ended the day by thanking the UCSF staff for the guidance and support they provided to the Youth Steering Committee, specifically Maria Cora, Judy Young, Kim-Shree Maufas, Joanne DeLeon, Chantel Green, Dixie Horning and Dr. Nancy Milliken.

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