



Antonio Hopkins Advanced Youth Mentoring Program

Antonio Hopkins, a 17 year old high school senior from Tampa's high-crime University Community area, could be drawing graffiti on walls and caught up with the local gangs. Instead, Antonio is drawing up a business plan for a community environment and arts project and spends his time with the local Teen Empowerment Council.

A teen advisor recognized Antonio's passion to better the community and recommended him for the Grassroots Leadership Program. Before participating in the program, Antonio described himself as an "off to the side person." Now, Antonio sees himself as a teen leader able to speak to all age groups and a diverse range of people.

Because of his leadership skills, Antonio was selected to participate in the Advanced Youth Mentoring Workshop where teens interact with college students, adults and youth-serving organizations focused on helping teens. Roles are reversed where the teens are the instructors and the adults are the students, allowing teens to teach collaborative skills from the youth perspective.

"Before being involved with the Advanced Youth Mentoring Program, I was intimidated speaking to adults and thought they had better things to do," said Antonio. "I've learned that adults really are interested in what you have to say and learning from you." One of his favorite parts of the program was the laughter – being able share a joke with someone 30 years older and both being able to see the humor.

His experiences prompted him to develop the "Going Green Committee" within the Teen Empowerment Council. His business plan ranges from securing additional recycling drop off centers to creating a tin can art show. For Antonio, trash doesn't end on the side of the street.

A community-based anti-crime initiative could not succeed without the involvement and commitment of the youth. Through positive peer pressure and leadership training, the youth are a powerful force in changing a community.

About the Advanced Youth Mentoring Program

The Advanced Youth Mentorship Program is a component of the USF Jim Walter Partnership Center's vision to equip the community with grassroots leadership training and techniques for the effective cooperation of youths and adults. Workshops provide training for youth and those who work with youth in the areas of leadership, relationship building and successful collaboration. The goal is to strengthen the voice of youth within civic and community-based organizations and non-profit leadership groups. The long-term objectives are to see the training and knowledge gained reintegrated back to the community thus aiding in sustainability and the promotion of youth advocacy.