



AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein
May 4, 2007

***“Rules of conduct:
Respect; confidentiality;
everyone’s opinion
counts; be non-judg-
mental; be sensitive,
caring, empathetic; no
putdowns or name-
calling; focus on what
you like, want, need.”***

-From the 2nd Annual
Youth Health Summit,
Albany High School,
April 28

Last week I attended the second Youth Health Summit at Albany High School. Described as an interactive workshop, this half-day summit brought together over 100 community members, teachers, parents and students to discuss ways of “inspiring kids to participate in school and community.”

The day started with a brief talk by the Albany Unified School District Assistant Superintendent, Marla Stephenson. “Our students are facing an increasing challenge moving from youth to adulthood,” she began. She went on to review the changes that have occurred since the last summit, including more school and mental health counselors. She emphasized the need for looking past academic achievement to the traits that make a person human, like compassion, respect and kindness.

The keynote speaker, Roland Williams, spoke next. Williams is Clinical Director of Bayside Marin, a drug rehabilitation recovery center in San Rafael, California. He started his speech by telling us that even

though he considers himself an expert in the field of addiction and substance abuse, he was surprised to recently discover that his 15-year-old son is drinking alcohol and smoking marijuana. “I ignored all the signs,” he told us - even though his son had changed his group of friends, fallen behind in school, become uncommunicative and stopped caring about his appearance. He pointed out that this isn’t that uncommon, because sometimes it seems easier to be in denial than to have to take action.

Because Williams works with recovering adults, he was able to reflect on what he has learned about addiction and some of the feelings behind it. “One of the most common complaints of adults entering treatment,” he told us, “is that they didn’t feel heard, validated or loved as a kid.” He encouraged us to apply this information to our relationships with our children - let them know they are important and that they matter. In the talk that followed, he touched on sex, racism, drugs,

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alcohol, tobacco, bullying, body image, eating disorders and depression.

In Williams’ speech he included a checklist of suggestions for parents from a workbook he wrote. “Go to any lengths to protect your children,” he advised. “Don’t live your life through your child. Teach them some sort of spiritual path. Stop doing what you are doing and pay attention to them. Tell them they are beautiful just the way they are. Hug them every day and tell them you love them.”

High school senior Cecilia Alvarado spoke next. We heard about her struggles with many of the issues Williams had talked about and she gave us her definition of resilience: “Maintaining dignity, self-respect and pride while having to endure some sort of struggle.” Her speech was honest and inspirational and many in the audience stood to clap when she finished.

The speeches were followed by two workshop opportunities. In the first one I attended, adults listened as Donna Teshima, LMFT, moderated a student discussion about parents and stresses at home. At the second one, psychologist and parenting leader Jamie Woolf lead a session on “Resolving Conflicts at Home with Accountability.” As she encouraged each of us to state our goal as a parent, it was thought provoking to hear what other parents were thinking. Happiness, hoping they find something they are passionate about, caring about others, being a responsible and independent adult – all of the answers made sense to me.

The best part of this summit was the openness and willingness to exchange ideas exhibited by everyone. I came away wishing these kinds of frank accepting conversations could be more a part of everyone’s lives.