

Youths guide elders during panel discussion

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Every so often, it doesn't hurt for youths and adults to experience a little role reversal.

This idea was illustrated last Friday, Dec. 3, when it was the adults asking youths for guidance.

An eight-member panel of teenagers shared their feelings about critical issues during a lengthy question-and-answer session. This event was part of a daylong conference titled, "Falling Through the Cracks: How to Keep 13-15 Year Olds on the Success Track." The conference was held at Colgate Rochester Divinity School, 1100 S. Goodman St.

Sponsored by the Catholic Youth Organization of the Catholic Family Center, the conference drew approxi-



Karen Kidston, a counseling intern at Rochester's East High School, listens to comments from the eight-member youth panel.

mately 150 adults who are involved in various youth services.

The panel discussion's moderator was Pat Fox, who serves as youth director at St. John the Evangelist Church, 150 Floverton St. During the panel discussion the eight teens — all Monroe County resident ranging in age from 14-19 — were frequently blunt with their observations.

Asked what adults can do to better serve the teens, Kadija Brown, 14, replied, "I think adults should watch what they do and watch what they say, because they're role models for us."

Lamar Johnson, 14, suggested creating more jobs, because "going on a corner and selling drugs is an easy buck."

Regarding teen pregnancy, Elizabeth Cathcart, 14, was both humorous and realistic when she mentioned media influence.

"We see (sex) on TV and say, 'Ooh, I wonder how that feels,'" Cathcart acknowledged.

"Parents should really teach their children (about sex) at a young age," said Vernon Reed, 19.

"Schools and parents should both get involved," added Candee Giannoccaro, 16.

Family was a frequent subject of discussion. In responding to a question about one's greatest fear, Andre Lamont Otis, 17, said, "To have nobody there for me; no love, no family."

"When I leave for school in the morning and kiss my parents goodbye — that I'll never see them again," was Brown's answer.

Others on the panel noted that their lives have been greatly affected by the fact that they've spent time in foster families.

"It's really scary. If you got separated from your brothers and sisters, wouldn't you be scared?" said Cathcart.

The subject of spirituality also surfaced.

"I keep God first. No matter what problem you have, you should always have someone to talk to, and that's God," Giannoccaro commented.

"I've been through so many problems that sometimes I say, 'where's God?' But through all that pain and suffering I still have God keeping me here and keeping me strong," Reed remarked.

In summing up, the teens emphasized that being regarded as equals is what they seek most from their elders.

"Treat everyone the way you'd want to be treated," said Giannoccaro.

"Give everyone respect," Brown, told the adults.

Fox, in his closing remarks, lauded the panelists by saying that "it is humbling to be in the presence of experts." The eight teens then received a standing ovation from their audience.

Also included in the day's activities were workshops and discussions for such people as youth-group leaders and teachers. Bob Mahar, CYO department director, acknowledged that the first-ever conference filled a critical void for adults.

"There tend to be youth days, but not anything for youth workers," Mahar observed.



Vernon Reed (right) answers questions from adults as moderator Pat Fox looks on. Reed was serving as a teen panelist during a Catholic Youth Organization conference held Dec. 3 at Colgate Rochester Divinity School.

S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer

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