

EMPOWERING YOUTH TO ACHIEVE GREATNESS

CMHA's Young Leaders Academy presented at the Bioneers National Conference

Members of the Young Leaders Academy had a wonderful opportunity to share their experiences at the Great Lakes Bioneers-Cleveland Conference, an acclaimed leading-edge forum that focused this year on communicating and celebrating the trailblazing work taking place in our region. The three day weekend conference took place simultaneously in California and, via satellite downlink, in Cleveland and 17 other communities across the country.

CMHA's GS-TAG Young Leaders Academy (Generation Success – Teens Achieving Greatness) presented their hour-long program on Saturday, October 18, 2008. The purpose of the presentation was to have attendees walk away with a greater sense of the academy, inspired by the students, and more awareness of the positiveness CMHA does for our community.

“The students make an impact on me everyday. I absolutely know their futures will be great,” said Theron Sumpter, Professional Development Instructor at CMHA. “This year has been one of the best years of my life with this program.”

Formerly known as Do the Right Thing, this youth employment and leadership program has been a part of CMHA for more than 16 years. Students participating in the program presented their experiences working in an office environment, while also attending workshops and field trips. The program assists 21 students from CMHA resident families in strong work ethic, leadership skills, and critical thinking skills.

“We're here to learn more about ourselves and what we want for the future,” said Latia Higgins, GS-TAG member and CMHA resident. “I never would have gone away to college without being a part of this group. I'm now home on break from the University of Toledo, and it was all because in GS-TAG I was exposed to different ways of life and taught how to better myself.”

Similarly, other students in the Young Leaders Academy have also been incredibly impacted by this special program. Jarraya Austin is a 3.8 GPA Tri-C student transferring to Cleveland State University to further her education. “Just because you grow up in public housing doesn't mean you can't be successful,” said Jarraya. “I have come a long way from just wanting to get out of high school to developing into a young lady. And now we all take care of each other like family. Since I watch over everyone, they have nicknamed me the grandmother of the group.”

It was difficult not to be moved or feel the emotion and heart given through the academy's presentation. The remarkable transformations and powerful insight the students shared left an intelligible mark on every one of the members of the audience listening that day.

“The purpose is to catalyze youth as agents of change, and my role is to support these young people in becoming their best versions of themselves,” said Adele DiMarco Kious, GS-TAG Academy Director. “This is an amazing journey we have all gone on together.”