

Youth groups seek to promote philanthropy groups among teens Round-table discussion addresses the future outlook of youth service.

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By Cameron Fullam

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Leaders of nonprofit organizations in Butler County caught a glimpse of the future Tuesday.

Representatives from three local youth philanthropy groups explained the work they are doing and answered questions from members of the Butler County Development Roundtable.

The 60-member group, founded in 2000 to promote the spirit of philanthropy, meets quarterly to discuss a range of topics.

Among these topics is the current outlook on the future of philanthropy and what local students are doing to promote giving in their communities.

"With philanthropy among younger generations, there is a sense that it is not going to be happening at the same levels as the current generation," said Kelli Kurtz, Hamilton Community Foundation vice president of development. "That is a very scary trend."

To address this concern, the Hamilton foundation started a youth in philanthropy group to pass the charitable baton to younger generations. The group creates programs serving Hamilton young people and gives grants to organizations serving youth.

The program is only the latest in a growing effort in Butler County to teach students the art of giving.

The Community Foundation of West Chester/Liberty started Youth in Philanthropy in 2004 in partnership with The Pulse-Journal.

To date, the group of 30 youth advisers has given out \$7,700 in grants, using money it has raised throughout the year.

"The fundraising is my favorite part of the organization," said YIP co-chair Kristi Ludlow, a senior at Lakota. "But it's hard to get a lot of teens excited about philanthropy."

The Oxford Youth Empowered to Serve program at Talawanda High School is the veteran organization at seven years old.

OYES Director Susan Vallade said the students in her group fundraise, study grant proposals and make grant decisions. She also teaches them about the importance of charitable giving.

"Philanthropy is just part of our social welfare system, and I discuss with my kids about policy and why when policy fails we need to step in," she said.

The community foundation in Middletown also has a similar youth program, but it did not attend the round-table.

All the students at the discussion agreed participating in a youth philanthropy program has given them an appreciation for the behind-the-scenes work that goes on.

"We learned a lot about how you run a program, how you start it," said Carley Kirsch, vice chairperson of Hamilton's program. "We made a mission statement, learned how to run the meetings, logistics and details."

When asked about how many of their peers have philanthropy on the mind, the student panel said many adults may have a wrong perception of youth.

A recent survey sponsored by the West Chester/Liberty YIP group revealed 31 percent of high school students in Lakota never volunteer and 7 percent volunteer often. The remaining 62 percent fall somewhere in the middle.

"A lot of kids my age want to help but they don't know how to go about it. When they try, some don't succeed the first time and so they don't try again," said YIP co-chair Robin Henegar, 15.

Kirsch said many students will participate in charitable work for school credit, but once they experience what is available, they come back for more.

"It's a matter of getting kids involved and getting out the names of people who need volunteers," she said.

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