



2012 Peer Educator Summit in Detroit

More than 65 students gathered at First Congregational Church in Detroit, Michigan, for the 2012 Michigan Peer Educator Summit on April 28. Groups traveled by bus to reach the event, which was one of the first statewide gatherings for peer educators to connect and network. The Summit focused on educating youth about social and reproductive justice issues in addition to facilitating discussion on the oppressive culture that affects our youth today.

The day began with presentations from each individual peer educator group. Ann Arbor, Battle Creek, Benton Harbor, Detroit, Flint, and Milan peer educator groups all presented to Summit members through a variety of mediums—acting, spoken word, poetry, visual arts—on the type of disease prevention work that they do. These creative displays ranged from HIV/AIDS education to the steps of proper condom use. Next, everyone received a presentation from Planned Parenthood field organizer Liz Ratzloff on defining heavy words such as oppression, power, prejudice, and privilege and incorporating them into our history and modern day struggles.

After lunch, peer educators received a history lesson as they toured First Congressional, a nationally registered Underground Railroad site. The tour proved an eye-opening expe-

rience for many students as they learned about the origins of American slavery and the conditions slaves endured. Peer educators also explored slave's use of songs and visual displays as tools to fight their oppression and ultimately aid them in their escape to freedom.

This led into an artwork activity organized by Rosemary Linares, a social justice consultant. Peer educators examined pictures and analyzed how meaning, power, and emotion could be held in an image. This helped students understand the role of art in social justice and inspired them to start thinking about their entries into the Planned Parenthood Activist Project, an activism competition in which individuals or groups of peer educators can submit their own art (videos, songs, paintings, etc.) for prizes and possible display across cities in Michigan. ■



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