

West Sac teens make their voices heard at City Hall

WITH VIDEOS, AUDIO, POETRY AND PHOTOS, THEY TELL STORIES OF THEIR COMMUNITY.

By HUDSON SANGREE
hsangree@sacbee.com

Teenagers complain that no one listens to them. In West Sacramento, their voices are being heard.

For three months, a group of teens armed with cameras and microphones roamed the streets, documenting what they liked and disliked about the city and urging changes.

The teens, part of a group called

Sactown Heroes, presented their results this week at City Hall, with Mayor Christopher Cabaldon and other officials in attendance.

The project is called Youth Voices for Change. It is one component of Healthy Youth-Healthy Regions, a unique \$1 million initiative sponsored by the UC Davis Center for Regional Change, the Sierra Health Foundation and the California Endowment.

Its aim is to draw connections between the well-being of young people, especially those growing up in low-income communities, and economic prosperity in nine counties

TEENS | Page B4



ONLINE PROJECT

To see Jessica Rice, left, visiting River City High School and other teens in a multimedia collection created on an interactive map by West Sacramento teenagers, go to www.sacbee.com/links

Teens: Mayor praises project

FROM PAGE B1

across the Sacramento region. The results - videos, photos, audio, poetry and other media - were documented on an interactive Google map where the teens' stories come alive.

The teens recommended cleaning up the West Sacramento's alleys and widening bike lanes. They critiqued fast-food restaurants and talked about their difficulties finding jobs.

Andre Bailey, 14, starred in a piece about the Collings Teen Center, where kids can get a free meal, play video games, and hang out.

Bailey said he felt safe going there after school. Right now the center, run by a faith-based nonprofit group, doesn't have enough money to stay open all summer. Bailey said it should.

"So kids can be safer and not lazy at home," he said.

Jessica Rice, 15, documented her introduction to the new River City High School campus, where she'll start ninth grade in the fall. She said the friendly people at River City High helped ease her fears of the move to high school.

"I'm scared about it, and they made me feel really comfortable," she said.

Patsy Eubanks Owens, a UC Davis professor who worked with the youth group, said the goal was to find out directly from teens what it's like for them to live in their community, get to school everyday and try to have fun.

The feedback is meant to influence policymakers, said Diane Littlefield, of the Sierra Health Foundation.

"The health of young people has an effect on the region's health as a whole," she said.

Cabaldon said the input would help West Sacramento focus on how best to help youth in tight times.

Teens don't vote, and they don't typically come to City Council meetings, the mayor said.

"We don't hear their perspectives the way we do some other parts of the community," Cabaldon said.

He said he was interested in the feedback on alleys. And he was glad to hear that teens liked a favorite fishing spot as much as older folks.

The same youth group had helped convince city leaders to enact a tough ordinance against stores that sell cigarettes to minors, the mayor said. A draft ordinance was approved by the City Council.

In prior discussions, teenagers had urged civic leaders to install a skateboard park, now a city favorite.

"That would never have come from 40-, 50-, 60-year-old council members," Cabaldon said.

Call The Bee's Hudson Sangree, (916) 321-1191.