

Reaching The Unreachable Stars - The Dilemma Of Disconnected Youth

By Frank Crump
and Rod Ambrose
(UPI Education)

On April 1, 2016, two young men, ages 22 and 19, were shot in a mini-park in South Phoenix. On April 18 a 17 and 18 year old were stabbed behind Cesar Chavez Library, resulting in the death of the 17 year old. Such occurrences have become commonplace in South Mountain Village.

On May 1 Congressman Rueben Gallego's office summoned local leaders of the African and Latino American communities to South Mountain Community College for a problem-solving meeting. In attendance were some of the best leadership minds, skilled practitioners of the social services, behavioral health, education, political and faith-based groups; each, sharing concern for the upsurge in local youth crime. The meeting centered around, "disconnected youth" (youth 16-24 years of age who have dropped out of school and are unemployed). As expected, education and first time job opportunities topped the list of potential solutions. Ironically, leaders proposed to bring our disconnected youth back into a "failed" Arizona educational system; which is one of the worst performing and poorly funded in the country. According to The State of

Black Arizona's recent data report (spring 2016) "Arizona is in the bottom five percent of state funding for education with an annual per pupil funding of \$7,205 in comparison, the national average per pupil is \$10,700. Over the past few years, there has been \$727 million dollars cut from K-12 education. For the public universities in Arizona, the governor and state legislature have cut more than \$460 million in funding over the last seven years. Arizona ranks 49th in per resident spending on higher education; reaching below \$116 per resident in the coming fiscal year". Arizona's disconnected youth crisis was born by second and third generations of disconnected youth who were failed by the same cycle of ill-advised education and economic policies.

Prior to the April and May murders, the city of Phoenix Youth and Education Commission assisted with rolling out President Obama's initiative "My Brothers' Keeper." To their credit the commission launched a leadership conference, surveying 150 students from Phoenix Union High school district about the kind of resources, programs and activities that would, keep them connected to family, school and future career prospects. The students yielded very useful information. However, a week after, the commission was asked, "How



did the goal morph into identifying and conferencing Phoenix Union (PU) teens who were all members of their school's student governments?" In other words those PU teens were not the "disconnected" – they were the "well connected."

Confronted with this constructive criticism, the commission's reaction was one of angst and frustration. A member stated, "We did attempt to engage the 'disconnected youths' but where are they? Who knows where or how to find them?" According to a report by Measure of America, "In the neighborhood of South Phoenix, almost one out of every three youths is not con-

nected to either school or work, while in Paradise Valley, Scottsdale, and Fountain Hills only one in every seventeen is adrift."

We can reach our disconnected a.k.a., 'opportunity youth' where they are most likely to be found; in correctional institutions like Adobe Mountain and Durango Juvenile Detention center. They are in homeless shelters and foster homes.

Disconnected teens hang out at park sites, after hours. Juvenile Probation Officers have many disconnected youth on their caseloads!

Once the disconnected teens are identified, we cannot immediately push these young

people towards what is regarded as a failed educational system. Disconnected youth immediately need direct access to effective community-support and life skills training. They need a loving anchor parent and adult mentors. They need first time job opportunities, which to them in many cases is more important than the idea of going to college.

We can and must turn the tide, Arizona. With the recent passage of Prop. 123, Arizona schools are poised to receive \$224 million - a year's worth of payments - in June. This can be viewed as a step in the right direction. From where we stand as a state, we can only go up!

Kappa League College Signing Day Ceremony



The Arizona Guide Right Foundation hosted the 13th Annual Phoenix Kappa League Showcase and Scholarship luncheon in late May. The event included the Kappa League's College Signing Day, which acknowledges the graduating Kappa League seniors and announces their college selection as part of the next phase of their education journey.

At this year's event, six young men announced their college selection choice. As part of the ceremony, each young man signed a document that outlined his commitment to strive for academic and personal excellence in pursuit of his college education. There were \$9,000 in scholarship funds awarded to these graduating seniors.

Young men recognized were Dallas Chewing (University of Arizona), Jonathan Johnson (Grand Canyon University), Sterling Leverett (University of Arizona), Kaleb Pitts (Columbia University), Dominic Scott (Xavier University of Louisiana) and Chase Steed (North Carolina A&T State University).

STORY AND PHOTO COURTESY KAPPA LEAGUE

Summer STEM Academy Underway More programs being planned

Edited by AZI Staff

STEM Academy is a community youth program organized by Community Educational Services, Inc., a small non-profit engaged in educational enrichment for youth and families through out Arizona.

Community Educational Services has partnered with the Adair Family Foundation to provide the STEM Scholars project for summer 2016 with plans to develop the program into the fall for more youth to attend. The program serves youth K through the 8th grade.

Funding from the Adair Family Foundation has made the 2016 STEM Scholars community initiative possible.

Cynthia Bush, former elementary school superintendent and classroom teacher is providing guidance in math and science to students in grade 3 through 5.

Youngsters in grades 6 through 8 are learning computer programming taught by software engineer Karen Crawford. Students in the advance grades will be visited by college professor Danny White who will provide a motivational message for youth to establish and follow through on educational plans.

The June program was held at the Mentorkids USA cite located at the Brooks Community School building.

To learn more about the STEM Academy and future plans email: stem-summeracademyaz@gmail.com

**The Success Of Our Community
Depends On The Success Of Our
Young People**