

Thank you, Darlene, for that warm welcome. I would like to thank all of you for attending this conference hosted by the Youth Commission – all day, you have listened to inspiring and dynamic featured speakers, attended workshops to educate yourself on different issues, and have networked with your peers. Now, in the presence of our respected Councilmembers, we celebrate, our city, our progress, our future.

Before we begin the State of the Youth Address, the Youth Commission would like to recognize specific individuals in the audience. If you fall under the category, please stand:

- Our City Council Members and Mayor: Thank you for being here with us today to support the work we do as the Youth Commission. We would not have been able to plan this conference without your commitment to viewing youth as resources. Thank you.

- Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services: Without your continued support, the Youth Commission would not be able to pursue any of its activities. Thank you.
- Members of Service Organizations such as Key Club, Interact, and Octagon: It is because of your service to this community that adults are beginning to see youth in a different light; as compassionate, caring individuals for their community and peers rather than children. Thank you.
- Youth Advisory Council members: Thank you for helping us make this conference happen by supporting your commissioners and informing us about the issues prevalent within our city. Thank you.
- And finally, the rest of the San Jose Youth Commission. All of us have worked for months to bring you this information that will help you *Beat the Statistics*. Thank you.

Two years ago, I was appointed as the District 1 Youth Commissioner for the City of San Jose and last year I was selected as Chair. The Youth Commission is a body of eleven individuals varied in age, ethnicity, and talent that was created to come together for the purpose of reforming and upholding the vision of San Jose's youth. I've been incredibly lucky to lead this group of talented young people to create an empowered voice for youth. With almost all of the decisions made by elected officials not going into effect until our generation is in charge, it's even more important to engage our generation in the decisionmaking process. The Youth Commission is here to help all of you achieve the mission of this year's conference: to beat the statistics that have stereotyped the youth of this city.

So now, let us tell you what we have done and what we must face for the upcoming years. But before we start, I just wanted to say that I love representing the youth of this city that I am proud to call my own. And now, please welcome Vice Chair Katie Hawn from District Nine.

Our generation is defined by labels, by stereotypes. We've been called delinquents and we've been called techies. We've been called an inspiration and we've become known as a generation so doped up on Myspace and Facebook that we have lost touch with reality. However, these few stereotypes do not define who we really are. We are a generation of students willing to engage and get involved. We are a generation who has come together to beat the statistics and to show the community what we are made of. While we are not perfect, we have done some amazing things, and we have some incredible programs right at our fingertips provided by the city. Even though we may be too young to vote or hold office, or raise millions of dollars to fund programs, we still have the power and the voice to make a positive change in our communities and to influence those who do have the power and who do have the money.

We are building a well-educated future. Not only are we smart, but we're pushing the envelope. We're showing others that even at a young

age, we can take college level courses and pass the tests. The amount of students who took and passed any Advanced Placement test has risen 4.8% in a mere six years. We are becoming a generation that is raising the bar. More and more students are taking advanced classes as if they were regular courses. Our desire to achieve more each year is constantly pushing us forward. We are taking advantage of our own homework centers and tutoring opportunities. These days, in this valley we are expected to succeed, and to me, we're exceeding that expectation and making jaws drop while doing so.

Academics are not the only things that allow us to succeed at our respective schools. Most schools have Key or Interact Clubs containing up to fifty, maybe even more, members. These clubs do service projects such as volunteering at local hospitals, community organizations such as Sacred Heart and decorating trees in Christmas in the Park. They also hold events such as holiday parties or dances to benefit such causes as the Make a Wish Foundation. Young people are volunteering like never before. It is estimated that 38% of students nationwide (10.6 million)

serve as part of their school curriculum; this doesn't include those students who give back to their communities outside of school, through their church groups or through service-learning programs like City Heroes. Our schools also have clubs such as Model United Nations and Junior State of America which allow us to come together and debate issues that some might think don't concern us— when in reality, we are the ones who will be placed in the position to solve them in the near future.

We're lucky in San Jose. I doubt we realize it though. I didn't realize it until someone pointed it out to me, but now, looking out into the audience, I see it as plain as day. San Jose has no majority race. There is no race that is more than 50% of our population. The fact that we're one of the few cities who can say that is absolutely incredible. We've grown up in the ultimate melting pot of cultures. It's become so common to us now that we don't even notice it. Getting a bite at a Chinese or Persian restaurant is considered almost a daily activity. Parts of other cultures have transcended our lives to make us who we are.

Each of us is enriched by the different cultures around us. We can pride ourselves on being well rounded not only in our daily student activities but in our cultural perspectives and knowledge. Every year Persian New Year celebrations at Vasona County Park have become something that we hear about through our own friends, not through our newspapers. We hear the sounds of firecrackers in downtown San Jose on Chinese New Year and know at least a few people who have missed something that night to celebrate the New Year with their family. We have the Mexican Heritage Plaza that showcases cultural events in the city. We have areas of San Jose where our billboards are written in Spanish or Vietnamese. It's incredible. Our diversity has enlightened us to a world beyond our city limits. Nowhere else can we walk to an intersection and have the option of Sushi, burritos or of course, McDonalds. Here in San Jose we have blended our own knowledge of other cultures to in turn make ourselves a better well-rounded generation. We live in anything but a bubble here. If anything, we have the ability to experience almost the whole world just because of our own community's diversity. For me,

growing up in San Jose has given me the opportunity to experience different cultures and to appreciate what those cultures have to offer.

Our diversity is just the beginning of what is available to us. We have community centers in each of our different neighborhoods, with each one providing us different services. Both Almaden and Camden have extremely active youth programs where they hold dances, pool and ping pong tournaments as well as movie nights. The thing is, adults don't put on a lot of these events. They're put on by us. We have the power to make this city a more positive environment for the youth. In the past few years, San Jose has struggled with the skateboarding issue. Because of a lack of places to go, skaters would use the local streets and park areas as ramps. As of 2007, Lake Cunningham opened a 40,000 square foot skate park complete with quarter pipes and bowls galore. Now we have a place free of charge for the youth to carry out one of their passions. If we can build more places where youth can have fun, the more we can decrease any violence or destruction in our city. The city has also provided services for their youth such as dance classes, daytime

preschools and after school programs. San Jose prides itself on the San Jose after school program that provides homework help, recreation, literacy, leadership and cultural arts experience.

Some of you maybe aware of the gang problem in San Jose. While it is an issue, The Mayors Gang Prevention Task Force is out in the field working with the students they see by trying to provide a better life through their work with counseling and intervention programs, focus groups, neighborhood associations, and other parent and community groups. Through their work and the work of others, San Jose gang violence has dropped 52% over the past few years.

The City of San Jose is continues to make its younger generation to be the best it can be. Even through these tough economic times, our officials are working hard to make sure our youth programs do not get cut. Our city values us. In turn, we are giving them good reasons to value us, by breaking a stereotype that has previously defined who we

are. The more we can work with our government through these budget cuts, the more money we will in turn gain for the youth of San Jose. Our local government supports us; we just need to make sure we give them a reason to continue supporting us.

The youth of San Jose is more than just a bunch of tech savvy kids skating on the streets. We are an educated group who has been raised in one of the most diverse communities of the United States. We have become something more than a statistic as we break through the barriers of the numbers professionals crank out for us. Now, it's up to us to show who we really are and to take advantage of everything offered to us in this city. It is up to us to carry out our dreams and to graduate from high school and go on to college, technical school, or the work force. It's up to us to continue making a difference in our communities and to carry out the wishes of those around us but also protect our own ideals and values. Now please welcome Aaron Carrera, Youth Commissioner for District three.

Thank you Katie. I am so amazed by all of the accomplishments teen have met, and while we have accomplished so many wonderful things, we still face many challenges. Some of these challenges include gangs, substance abuse, dropout rates, issues of self-esteem and peer pressure and ... unfortunately teens will face some new obstacles with the recent budget cuts.

We all know that gangs exist in San Jose. Many of us know someone who has been impacted by gang violence. There are an estimated 24,500 gangs reported in the United States, in San Jose there are several of them that we are trying to overcome. Much of the gang related crime is committed by teens between the ages of 15-17. Once a young person joins a gang it is almost impossible for them to get out; the mentality of a young person in a gang is that it is what they live for and sometimes what they die for.

Gang violence threatens a teen's safety in many ways. Often times the violence transcends into our neighborhoods and schools. How many of

you have witnessed gang violence firsthand? Living where gangs are prevalent I have seen my share of gang violence. Many of my friends became involved with gangs as early as middle school. This was no quick change, my friends slowly started to become more and more involved and it was difficult even for me to see them as a gang members, after all I have known these guys my whole life. For those of you who think gangs don't live in your neighborhood, know that you don't have to be a gang member to be a victim of gang violence. When I was fifteen, I was a victim of gang violence. Walking home from the center one night a car pulled up in front my house and asked us for the time. Before I knew it three guys confronted me and asked, "do you bang" I said no and was struck in the face. They kept asking me if I banged and although I kept saying no, the two guys continued to attack me. When it was over I ran home and it was then that I realized that I had been stabbed twice, once in the stomach and once in the leg. I tell you this story because I want you to know that anyone can become a victim of violence and you never think that it will happen to you, especially in the

safety of your own home. We need to make sure that our youth feel safe in their neighborhoods and in their schools.

Another challenge that teens face is substance abuse. Recent studies state that Santa Clara County's youth experiment with drugs from the early age of twelve. 65-70% teens have tried marijuana by the age of sixteen. 30% of high school students reported that they drink or have drunk alcohol. We had all heard the negative consequences of drinking and doing drugs yet teens still continue to use them despite the danger they cause not only to your body but to others as well. According to the center for disease control and prevention, in 2005, nearly three out of ten teens reported that, within the previous month, they rode in a car with a driver who had been drinking alcohol.

Substance abuse doesn't just affect those who do it, but it affects those around you as well. This is why it is so important that teens are given the right information about how harmful drugs and alcohol can be.

Education, teen centers, and after school programs are major tools in

helping to prevent teens from becoming addicted to drugs and alcohol. Yet, the funds that would provide these programs and education could be cut.

The state of California made several budgets cuts, which impact us here in San Jose. Budget cuts affect youth in our schools, in our homes and in many of the vital youth services that the city provides. Some very important places that help youth stay out of trouble are youth centers and after school programs. Community Centers around San Jose provide teens with homework help, tutoring, gang prevention programs, leadership classes, and so much more. But the most important thing that these centers provide is a safe place to be.

Many of the youth services that the city provides offer teens the opportunity to meet new people and give them valuable experiences that help to prepare them for the future. The budgets cuts might mean that many of these programs would no longer be available for us.

Budget cuts are also affecting our schools. School districts are making some hard decisions about what to cut from our schools. Things like sports, art, music, drama and other extra curricular activities, which bring so much value to youth, are being removed from our daily lives. These activities give a young person a better-rounded experience, they teach teamwork, creativity, and give them an opportunity to express themselves. School shouldn't be just about tests and scores but also about getting a well-rounded education through different facets of life. With schools not being able to offer these essential programs, many students could potentially lose interest in school, increasing the dropout rate across the state.

Currently one in four high school students in California do not graduate from high school. That's means that statistically over 50 of us in this room will not graduate. We need to take action to make sure that not just all of us in this room graduate, but more and more teens are getting high school diplomas and a higher education.

Our lives revolve around school, friends, and our home problems. We all get lectured from our parents from time to time. Sometimes because of our grades, our habits, or who we tend to hang out with. It is overwhelming trying to figure out who we are when we have so many people telling who we should be. It is no surprise that this pressure often times lead to low self-esteem. Youth who suffer from low self-esteem fall into bad habits. 46% of teens with low self-esteem tend to use drugs and drink alcohol, and 37% join gangs. All of these challenges have a great impact in our youth's lives. Gangs, substance abuse, dropout rates and low self-esteem are the major challenges in our lives. Everyday we have to make choices . . . to rise above these challenges so that we can mature into successful adults of the future. Now please welcome Nicholas Taxera, Youth Commissioner from district 6. tr45

Thank you Aaron. Overcoming the challenges Aaron spoke of will not be easy. I do not want anyone in this room to think that the problems most of you have been learning about over the course of the day will take the minimum effort to solve. These are not just issues related to

funding or lack of a better education; these are issues dealing with how we view others, ourselves, and our state of mind. In the land of the free, and in the heart of Silicon Valley, we have to cope with things that should be nonexistent. We are better than the issues we face, and the youth of San Jose *will* prove it.

Project Cornerstone has identified 41 developmental assets that allow young people to thrive. Developmental assets are the positive relationships, opportunities, values and skills that young people need to grow up caring and responsible. These “assets” range from family support to motivation to succeed to having a positive cultural identity. And from what I’ve seen, heard, and learned, a majority of youth, our children and students, are suffering from an asset shortage right now. Yes, there are those amazing few, who feel confident enough to raise their hand in class or involve themselves in countless clubs and organizations. But what about the rest? Should we dismiss them as being too much to deal with? No, we should not. Let’s face it, there was a moment in most of our lives that was so pivotal that we could have gone

either way. So if we decide to tackle these problems, we need to provide assets and the tools to not only help ourselves but others as well.

Parents and guardians are the foundation of our development. There is only so much the city can fund or schools can teach. This is why the role of our parents, guardian and other adults, is so critical to influencing our youth and the future of our city. The support that our parents must provide might seem daunting in its responsibility and importance, but without it what will we as youth have. Asking us where we are going, who we hang out with, or just asking how school went show us that you care. Become involved in every aspect of our lives. Adults should have high expectation of us. Do not look at us like the media does (as careless individuals who only create problems) rather, look at us as potential doctors, lawyers, or just good people that the world is lucky to have. Look at us as the solution, engage us, listen to us . . . because what we have to say matters. Believe it or not, when it comes to youth, we will meet your expectations, so set the bar high.

For the home away from home, aka school, nurturing our youth might seem hard when given little resources. (But I am sure we can succeed. We just have to redefine what school is.) From now on school should not just be a place where youth spend a majority of their time with information being drilled into their heads, it should be a place of bonding and personal and social progression. School faculty should work to make schools more attractive and enjoyable in order to increase a student's motivation to learn. When youth go to school, they should feel like they are in a safe environment where they can hang out and talk with people not just about academics but also about life. Teachers play a particularly vital when it comes to this. We see teachers as more than just educators but also as a source of support and guidance. This increases the motivation to achieve as well as the motivation to be good citizens that contribute to society. Challenge us, inspire us, but most importantly do not give up on us.

Our community, can help us overcome these challenges as well. Again, the stereotypes that the media associates with youth is hurtful. "Get off

my lawn” has been replaced with “911, there are some young kids outside and they look like they are up to no good.” Instead of using resources to limit youth, we should use youth as resources. Instead of using us as scapegoats, we should be used to help solve problems.

However, this can't happen if we don't get support, from our community. It is imperative they fund programs for our youth. We need to know and be shown that our community values us, that we can be a part of building our own future.

Now most importantly, our youth. Looking out at this crowd, I see the potential for a revolution, a revolution in our way of thinking and a revolution for our future. There are so many things to be done and so many ways of going about doing them. We can choose to stay in our comfort zone, to never exceed expectations or to acknowledge our potential, or we can break away from tradition and enact change. Change in how we deal with others and ourselves, change in how we act and think. Like our parents, teachers, council members, and everyone else, we need to set high expectations for each other and ourselves. Let us

help each other. Let us stop each other from following a destructive path or taking out our inner turmoil on other people. We need to be positive influences not only to each other but also to the generation that is right behind us.

Let us give to the community not because we need to get back something in return, but because our community and society need our help. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said, “Anyone can be great, because anyone can serve.” No matter who you are, you have the ability to give something valuable to someone in need. help you younger sibling with their homework, take part in a neighborhood cleanup, or volunteer at a community center.

Let us go against the grain and make it impossible for our children and grandchildren to say that we really should have done things differently. No matter the problem we will rise to face it, no matter the obstacle we will rise to overcome it. It will not be easy, but we will succeed!

As it is said, “good leaders create a vision, articulate the vision, passionately own the vision, and relentlessly drive it to completion.”

Now that we have celebrated our accomplishments and have recognized our challenges, it is time to formulate our combined vision and look into our future, and let me tell you, I sincerely believe that the future of the youth of San Jose is looking bright.

As the tenth largest city in the nation, with 100,000 teenagers, there’s no reason why we can’t make an impact. As we move into the future, let’s work to voice our opinions and establish an equal partnership with adults so that we have a say in our education, our youth programs, our city. By demonstrating our knowledge and our capabilities, I hope that youth will be portrayed positively in the media and in the eyes of adults – as assets; individual with purpose, meaningful ideas, substance.

Take a look around the room and think about what you see. You may see individuals differing based on height, race, age, gender, but I only see a collective group, a voice. Along with cultural competence, we should

look past who we are on the outside, and look to who we are on the inside – individuals that share the same vision: to be bold, get heard, and become the voice.

From this day on, I challenge each and every one of you to rise to the challenge, seize the opportunity, and demonstrate active, passionate leadership to make a difference in your community, nation, and world.

As we work together and agree to make a difference, now is the time for us to hear what you pledge to do this upcoming year in order to improve the state of the youth in San Jose. Whether you are pledging to perform 100 hours of community service, encourage your friends to stay in school, or quit smoking, every pledge matters. This year, as a commissioner, I pledge to continue to serve as a powerful and cohesive voice for my district. In my school, I pledge to pick up trash that I see around campus. Please stand up if you are interested in delivering your pledge.

We've heard your pledges, we've formed our vision, and we are now ready to move towards our promising future. Youth of San Jose, this is who we are today, and only our actions will decide who we are tomorrow, and for the upcoming year.

It is an immense honor for the San Jose Youth Commission to serve this diverse and flourishing city, but we are only eleven individuals representing 100,000. As the youth of San Jose, we've accomplished so much. We've shown what we can do. Now we need to grow, and fill the shoes of those above us. While we have done so much, there is still so much left to do, but after looking at these statistics, our own cultural diversity, and the passionate youth in this very room: I know we can do it. Thank you.