

### **Next Century Youth, Inc. stumbles on “Diamonds in the Rough”**

Roswell, GA – “I am not looking for the “cream of the crop”, but if you are given an opportunity to participate in our Web Preneur program which includes some hands on web design along with some heavy discussions around making good choices, then as far as I am concerned you will be the cream of the crop for this program. This was the message that Next Century Youth, Inc. conveyed to a number of students at Crossroads Second Chance Program. Crossroads is an alternative school who address the needs of chronically disruptive students in Fulton County who have been expelled from their home schools and received a waiver expulsion from a Tribunal Hearing to allow their attendance. Here they are able to continue their core academic studies in a small, non-traditional setting, while also focusing on their social and academic life skills development and learn acceptable behavior norms to allow them to transition back to their home schools.



**Next Century Youth, Inc. (NCY)** after spending some time working with youth in 2004 who were housed at a Georgia Youth Detention Facility knew there was work to be done with our youth, but also knew we needed to reach them before they were exposed to detention and/or incarceration. This passion and initiative is what led to our offering a Web Preneur (web design and development class) for students at Crossroads. The Executive Director also knew that if you really wanted to learn more about the issues our youth are exposed to or what our youth think needs attention within our homes, schools and community overall today, then you really owe it to yourself to ask them directly. Those not accustomed to seeking input from youth might be surprised at how they are able to articulate the needs as well as offering viable solutions. As a result, the Executive Director solicited initial feedback from her own children who serve as Youth Advisors for NCY, Inc. and was told that such a program in our area was much needed, as they see kids getting caught up in this vicious cycle daily.

The Web Preneur program though designed to teach and instill skills on web site development also allowed NCY, Inc. to facilitate a much needed interaction with the youth on choices and the level of thinking that should be included with such choices. ***The entire program was funded by a grant made available by Fulton County Human Services Department (F.R.E.S.H. Grant), IBM, and personally by the Executive Director of Next Century Youth, Inc..*** The youth are actually worked with NCY, Inc. to finalize a G2 Focused Initiative which will eventually be offered to high schools throughout Metro Atlanta and ultimately throughout the southeast. The program will incorporate elements of Leadership, Choices, Academics and perhaps the strongest components will address the re-engagement and re-connection of the parent/support structure back with the youth.

The interest level of the youth participants was incredible. We began with approximately 17 youth and after a number of sessions and observing those who were truly engaged and wanted to be a part of the solution, we narrowed our group down to approximately 10 students. The nucleus of our group truly drove this initiative and look forward to the implementation within their high schools. Much of the initial credit for the program goes to Mike Serna, Eugene Watson, and Devon Young, for without them much of G2 Focused would not have been realized. Along with the help of the following students and administrator, we were able to realize something truly workable unique for the youth: Danielle Hambrick, Jessica Wallace, Paris Ross, Pedro Aguilar, Carlos Garcia, Quentin Cullins, Josh Neal, James Craig and local sponsor/advocate, Mrs. Lisa LaFaver. Without their input there is no way we could have arrived at these ideas so quickly. Dr. Borishade, the Principal of Crossroads Second Chance North Fulton shared that she couldn't believe how NCY, Inc. was able to get the youth engaged in this manner, but continued to hear positive things from week to week. Programs will be made available for high school, especially in terms of the Leadership and Think/Choice Sessions, but some of the programs will benefit high schools but will only be offered to students outside of the schools. “I think this is the beauty of the program” comments Mary Brooks Green, Founder of Next Century Youth, Inc. – “the responsibility is now being placed back where it should be”. Our youth are groomed for personal accountability so that when they are within their school, they are “coming in” with the tools, the focus, and the support that prepares them for learning and ultimately for success. We will also be offering a sports component in which synergies will be built with Athletic Directors - youth who are typically under-represented and considered high risk will receive competitive exposure in sports if they have aspirations of showcasing their talents like other high school students. All of these programs will definitely aid our youth with refocusing on their priorities while in school – “their education” being first.

NCY has met with local schools and is planning to meet with others to look into some level of collaboration for the 2007/2008 school year. We are also meeting with others and entering dialogue for delivering such programs in some capacity as far away as Miami and Mississippi. Long term, it is our plan to provide the programs throughout the entire southeast.

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