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Institute for Youth, Education, and Families**

What to Do When Youth Say, "There's Nothing to Do"
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Speakers:

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Forth Worth, TX.

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KYLE: Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to the National League of Cities' Institute for Youth, Education and Families' audioconference. Today our topic is "What to Do when Youth Say, 'There's Nothing to Do.'" We really have a good panel of experts to help us with this topic today. We have Susan Potts, who is a community outreach specialist with the National Recreation and Parks Association based here in Suburban Washington. Susan, say hello.

POTTS: Hi, everyone.

KYLE: We have Asha McElfish, who is a high school junior in Fort Worth, Texas, a member of the Youth Council in Fort Worth and also a member of NLC's Council on Youth, Education and Families, the only NLC council that has both adult and youth members. Good afternoon, Asha.

MCELFISH: Hi, how are you doing, Sir?

KYLE: And last, we have Lynn Hathaway, who is a children and youth planner in the Community Service Department for the City of Santa Fe, New Mexico. Good afternoon, Lynn.

HATHAWAY: Good afternoon, John.

KYLE: We're all here today to talk a little bit about this topic of activities for youth and what municipalities in particular can do when youth will say, "There's just nothing to do in this city. There's nothing to do in my town." Asha, can you give us a little viewpoint of what you think youth are meaning when they say that? Are they literally meaning, "There's nothing to do"? Or are they trying to convey some other kinds of messages at the same time.

MCELFISH: I think it's not so much that there's nothing to do, like a complete lack. I think it's a lack of variety, and also cost-efficient options. I mean, you can't go to Six Flags every day. Ours here is like \$40 a ticket, so kind of expensive. And also you don't want to do the same thing day after day after day. So I think what it is, they don't have any kind of seasonal variety really. It's just like four or five options in the city and that's it.

KYLE: Lynn, in Santa Fe, are you hearing this kind of question from youth at all? And what do you think they're meaning?

HATHAWAY: We've been hearing it ever since I've been in this job, which is about 16 years. And I'm sure they were saying it before then. I'm wondering, Asha -- it seems to me that it's not just things to do. It's also in our community feeling that they're not connected, that there is kind of age segregation. Is anybody else feeling that way, that adults and kids --?

MCELFISH: Not so much here, that I've come to find.

KYLE: Susan, you've had your hands in probably a lot of information from various cities and towns across the country. What's your take on this question? Is it something that is happening to lots of cities? What do you think about it?

POTTS: I think that it's happening across the country that there's a struggle with youth not being involved. I think with Parks and Recreation, I know that our members and non-members alike, I hear across the country from Phoenix just this week to North Carolina last week that they're struggling to engage youth and really reach out to them and get them involved on a consistent basis with the youth councils. There is a lot of involvement on the initial end, but then it's sporadic to continue to keep them involved. And I think they're trying to print program avenues to meet the needs similar to what has already been expressed about the expense, of opportunities, not being a variety of. And we're also seeing a lot of kids dropping out of programs because they're just not having fun. And so I think Parks and Recreation is trying to address the challenge through adventure programming in a lot of ways, and also creating some youth-directed councils.

KYLE: Lynn, talk a little bit more about your idea here about connectedness, and youth are not as well connected.

HATHAWAY: Well, I think at the last National League of Cities Your Cities' Families Conference, there were sessions -- people were talking about the idea of disconnected youth. So maybe some young people feel more connected, including not only with families -- have more connection with their own families and with schools. But there are some kids who don't have many of those connections that make them feel involved. So I think it's bigger than just having a program to go to.

MCELFISH: I can definitely understand that.

KYLE: What does being connected mean to you, Asha? How is Fort Worth making -- you in particular, when Lynn was asking this a few minutes ago, said you felt like in Fort

Worth there were plenty of opportunities to feel connected, and your friends and colleagues felt connected. How can you describe that further? What is going on to make you feel that way?

MCELFISH: I know one of the problems we face, and I think most youth face, is you know there's stuff to do. The trick is finding it. And there is no one particular -- or at least I'll speak for myself here -- in our city that I know of, there is not one particular webpage or resource you can go to that says, "This is available to you. These are the coffee shops. These are the clubs. These are the places you can go." And it's kind of like you hear it through word of mouth or just friends, or even just going onto Google and hunting it down yourself. But it's not readily available. And I know that's a large problem because if you have something, you want to say, "Hey, come to it!" But if you don't market it, then you're not going to be able to get youth involved in that community.

HATHAWAY: That's a really good point. We're thinking about how to do that better. And ours is a fairly small community. The city is about 70,000 people, and the outlying county is another 50 - 60. So it's about 120,000 people in our community. And we are finding that youth don't necessarily read the newspaper. Imagine that.

MCELFISH: Yeah, definitely.

HATHAWAY: And we do have a youth page on Fridays, and we do have several newsletters. But there isn't any one source for youth activities.

MCELFISH: May I add to that? In our city, on Tuesdays we have a youth session, but it mainly stops at about age 13, where there is a whole calendar of events and wonderful creative stuff for stay-at-home moms and what not. But once you hit high school, it's really where it just breaks off because a lot of parents -- you know, they used to go, "Well, my kid's in high school. They're becoming more self-sufficient, they can take care of themselves and entertain themselves." And of course with driving, I think that adds to it as well. But when you're younger, you have way more creative stuff to do and social activities in the city where you can get together with you. But I know once you hit the teenage age, it just breaks off entirely. You hang out with your friends or you're on your own, basically.

KYLE: Susan, tell us more about the work you've been doing that helps folks focus on engaging youth. You were using that term earlier. What are you seeing as what communities - parks and recreation departments in particular -- are doing to engage youth?

POTTS: We're starting to do a project called "Step Up to Health." And that's really all that encompasses health, and we're really challenging our professionals to really reach out to the community on a whole, but also to really consider the programming that they're offering to all aspects of the population they serve. And particularly youth is an area where we have youth that is so much more sophisticated than when myself was a youth. The Internet is a major tool for them, and really engaging them around some of the networks and the things that kids are savvy about. And trying to expand into those markets and getting them to think about -- much like a Nike or a Coca-Cola would about their branding image -- how to outreach to those kids and how to get them involved. And using some of those common marketing

strategies that are used with so many of the trendy population needs like Nike tennis shoes and those kind of things and taking that image --

MCELFISH: I like that idea.

POTTS: And we're starting just to see some success with that. And because kids are so much savvier with the Internet nowadays than ever, that we really need to change our approach with them. And I think the idea about a network of all the resources for the targeted age around the youth is a great idea. And it actually took somebody who is a youth to say that this is a need and communities should be looking to create directories where there are offerings. We do it for seniors. Why wouldn't we do it for youth?

MCELFISH: Absolutely. And actually, it's cost-efficient, too. I mean, creating something like that -- maybe a paper copy, not so much. And besides, the Internet would be way more accessible. But something like that would not cost a lot of money and a city could easily do that, I think.

POTTS: Most cities already have the web technology in place. It's just creating the directory and getting youth involved in helping create that directory and getting youth at the table when we're talking about opportunities that they want to be exposed to and things they want to do. I think Glendale, Arizona saw huge success with a cultural arts program that they did with youth where they actually employed youth for a period of time within their cultural drama program. And kids were actually learning a trade and actually making income, and then also getting some life skills with that experience. And I think part of that is contributing in being connected with the community as well. And I think those are really good points that Lynn brought up as well. It's that connectedness and keeping them connected and giving them a network. And listening -- I think we need to listen a lot more to the youth of today.

HATHAWAY: May I say something? The directory is a great idea. Having teenagers do it themselves is something I was just thinking -- I'm glad you added that, Susan. I was also thinking when I was listening to you talk about the marketing idea -- one of the things we're finding here with all age groups is that one-to-one relationship, and what a big difference it makes. And even with teenagers -- I know people sometimes say that teenagers don't really want to have anything to do with people their parents' age. But one of the things we did a few years ago was develop conversations. I've actually forgotten what it was called. There was a technical term for it. But helping -- pairing up an adult with a teenager at one of our teen centers and helping them have conversations. And it was really one of the most interesting things I've done in this job and being in this community. It was quite wonderful. I wish we would do more of that kind of thing.

KYLE: What are some of the activities in Fort Worth, Asha, that appeal to you that the city is doing, or that are really opportunities for you. List some of the things that the city is providing or that you've dug out and know that are available to youth in your community? Because that whole menu may be different than what's available in Glendale or North Carolina that Susan experienced, or in Santa Fe for Lynn. So give me a little menu of what youth can do in Fort Worth.

MCELFISH: We have a lot of outdoor festivals in our downtown area. And one that just finished up recently was Main Street Arts Festival. And this is put on by Downtown, Inc, which is its own little enterprise, but it works in conjunction with the city. And it's not viewed towards any one particular age group. It's really geared toward, of course, art lovers and music lovers. But it's free to the public, and of course, you need to buy tickets for food and what not, but there is live music. There are ten blocks worth of art -- it goes down our Main Street. And it's wonderful. Youth show up. Adults show up. Everyone in the community shows up for this. And it's one of the great draws because we have artists from all over the country come. So people from all over show up.

But as far as actual events that our city puts on for youth -- we have a youth town hall, but we don't do anything as far as for kids at this point that I can think of.

HATHAWAY: What's the youth town hall?

MCELFISH: It is an event that happens once a year, usually in September. And we invite, get out flyers to all the schools and as many youth as possible in the city. And we usually get about 150, maybe 200 youth that show up. And it starts at eight in the morning, and we have brainstorming sessions in groups of about 15 - 20 people. And they have a city worker come with us -- someone who works on the administrative side. And we have issues that are predetermined, and we'll talk about them -- city curfew, police and how they act towards youth -- a whole variety of things. So it's basically a brainstorming session so city officials can go back and say, "We need to really reevaluate this."

POTTS: And then mostly city -- city -- all issues.

MCELFISH: For the most part, yes. And also they can sit down and say, well, the youth -- they had this issue predetermined that they really didn't talk about, but it's not applicable. It's not that important. So they can switch it up and talk about things that really are important, that really are on their minds. And once the brainstorm sessions finish up, everyone goes into City Hall and they have a special session where they can all talk and be heard and what not. It's usually held on a Saturday.

POTTS: To the city councilors?

MCELFISH: Yes.

POTTS: Oh, that's a great idea.

MCELFISH: Yeah, it's wonderful. And it's been very popular. It's increasingly more attended each year.

HATHAWAY: That's great.

KYLE: One thing you did in Santa Fe, Lynn, that I know about is a plan for youth. Can you talk a little bit about how you developed that idea and what change or difference it's meant in how you go about providing services to youth in the city?

HATHAWAY: Yes, we did develop a plan. We are updating it now. One of the things we didn't do very well is we bit off more than we could chew. We tried to have a plan for the entire city -- the whole community. And then there were things that we really could do nothing about. But things came about anyway. I mean, since the plan, if not because of the plan, but perhaps because we highlighted the kinds of things that youth needed, we do have two skate parks. We do now have an ice skating rink at a new community center. And I'm not saying that the plan made that happen, but one of the goals in the plan was to increase recreational opportunities, activities and places where kids could be. What else am I supposed to say? (laughter)

POTTS: And I think you kind of hit the button there, on the nose. So kids could have a place to go. Youth needs a place that they can somewhat take ownership in and know that this is a place that is for them. Working in camps with youth, they need what they called "slab time" where they can hang out --

HATHAWAY: -- Slab?

POTTS: Slab time.

MCELFISH: That's a new one on me. (laughter) I like it.

POTTS: And it was a time for them to be able to hang out, talk and just be with each other and feel that connectedness without having the influence of a counselor or a staff person directing them. And it seemed very evident to us, and the programming without that dedicated time and actual space for them to be in this is kind of designated as their area and really an opportunity for them, that they just had a really difficult time on the whole. And so we really recognized that that was an important piece and that they need areas and some designated space -- it's youth and it's their place to be and to come together. And they don't have to worry about some of the influences from other groups, and they can be in a safe area. I think safety is another key that --

MCELFISH: -- Absolutely.

POTTS: -- youth are concerned about. They're concerned about their safety and they're concerned about the safety of their friends and having a place to go that's safe and accessible for them.

KYLE: I think the whole notion of a place for them is something that coincides very nicely with asking youth what they want. Because I've been in too many communities that said, "You know, we need to build a teen community center. Let's have a teen center. Let's build a skate park." And they go ahead and do it and no young people go because they didn't factor in how they would get there. They didn't figure in what it would cost for youth to use it, if there was going to be a cost. And they didn't factor in that it really wasn't in the right place geographically. It was a good open space, but the youth didn't live near there and there was no good transportation there.

MCELFISH: Exactly.

KYLE: It's a matter of really listening to youth about that before a large amount of money is spent to create a particular space that won't get used. I think there has even been examples of communities where the city was willing to spend the money, and the youth didn't want it at all. Instead, they wanted computer labs in their schools or something totally different. So there really needs to be a good match between what the city can provide or is willing to provide and what the youth want. And one can't go without the other, whichever one comes first.

MCELFISH: Yes, actually to run on that, we have a great skate park here in Grand Prairie. It's right between the two major cities. But it's in the middle of nowhere basically. There is no bus service that goes to it, and you have to drive 20 minutes from the East Side of Fort Worth to get to this place. If you're on the Far West Side, it's going to be a bit of a drive.

And also as far as places for youth to hang out, I know when we had our last NLC conference in December, I got to talk to a lot of other youth boards around the country. And they had some similar ideas of let's have a teen hangout spot. Well, one problem that they've encountered was they got a bunch of wrong kind of people attending after a while and finally had to shut it down because of security issues. But I don't have any kind of experience with any kind of teen center in our city. But I know one of the major places to hang out around here is bookstores. We have a couple of Barnes and Nobles, and you go in at any time and it looks like a small school invaded them. And coffee shops along with them -- big, comfortable, squishy chairs, you know -- sit around, read a book, hang out, talk to your friends.

POTTS: That's great.

KYLE: A variation of that is projects that are going on in libraries across the country. The Libraries Association has had a project I think working with nine cities -- one in Phoenix that I can think of offhand -- where youth have helped to design the new library or the space for youth to use in the library, up to and including coffee available in the library. And powers that were more convenient to what youth needed to use, as opposed to what traditional adult or young child users might be wanting.

HATHAWAY: That's very interesting. May I comment? We have several teen centers -- they're small teen centers. And I think that's one of the reasons they work, because some kids may be interested in arts and they may go to Warehouse 21, which is the arts -- it's an afterschool, weekend and summer arts program. We have a city run teen center in conjunction with an afterschool program, which is considering a move to another part of town, which is between three schools -- between -- actually the high school and the two middle schools, I guess. And it's right next to a library. And so we've just begun to have those conversations about how the library and the teen center could work together, especially without computers.

KYLE: How do the recreation departments that you're working with, Susan, define success? How are they figuring out if they're doing a good job in meeting the needs of young people in particular or not?

POTTS: I think that we're starting to kind of identify some of those key evaluation components to measure that success. One factor would laugh at that as a key to measuring

success, but if they're not participating, they're not finding it fun. And that has to be an element for anyone to participate, including youth. And it has to be fun and engaging for them.

The programs that we've seen some success with are the Mayor's Night Basketball that Kansas City has and opportunities for youth to come in and play basketball in a center that's open until one in the morning. And times where it's an improved structured setting that again has that accessibility for them where they can get in at a later time. And also it's near transportation and accessibility has to be a critical element when we're evaluating where to put the teen centers and where to put teen programs -- whether it's in a neighborhood parks program. It has to be where kids can access it. If it's going to be with the library, involving them in the location selection and the time is an essential piece that we're just really starting to rally around and really get our folks engaged and around. We're talking a lot about youth not participating in programs, and we're also starting to have a dialogue about some of the potential and some of the successes that we can find with some of the programs that we did ten or fifteen years ago that need to be revitalized and need to be reevaluated. The evaluation piece on success is a struggle for us, and we're continuing to work on that as a field.

KYLE: Lynn, how do you figure out if your centers or your skate park or any of the other activities or initiatives are working or not, or making strides toward achieving the success you want? How do you figure that out?

HATHAWAY: Well, I'm not so sure -- we don't have actual outcome measures for those programs other than participation. We do have outcome measures in the programs we give -- the community programs that we help to fund. And some of the things we look at are skill development and knowledge -- increased knowledge. We have between 35 and 45 programs that are given city grants every year. And we encourage those programs when it's possible to either have youth as volunteers in the program or to have youth as employees. And that is really one way that we engage youth. And each of those programs has their own set of outcome evaluations, which we would be happy to share with other people.

MCELFISH: May I comment on that, please? One of the usual problems we face at Fort Worth is we have an excellent parks and rec. centers. We have I think 20 altogether around the city, or maybe 15. And they're all well attended and have a lot of programs going on. But once you've passed the age of about 12 or 13, there is nothing for you to do.

POTTS: Ah!

MCELFISH: Yeah, I know. (laughs) It's kind of annoying. At our last youth council meeting, we were discussing what we could do to remedy that, what we could offer and how we could get teens more involved in their community centers because they are there. And some money is already being allocated for them. Why not go ahead and try to get youth to use that?

POTTS: And what did you come up with?

MCELFISH: We tabled that one. (laughs) We're coming back to it a little more. But I think we're coming up with ideas that could be implemented within the next year -- for our next

budgetary year over the summer and what not.

HATHAWAY: One of the things we do have -- we have teen nights, which are put on by the Boys' and Girls' Club or -- you know, we have 21 youth-serving groups -- where different bands come and different kinds of music, of course, attract different groups of teens. So that's one way to get kids together.

MCELFISH: Where is it held? Like in a building or outside?

HATHAWAY: Mostly inside in a community center. We have several around town. But the other thing I was going to say is this idea of creative expression -- not just the arts, but engaging teens in playing music, singing. We have a new program that we're funding this year which is a poetry slam -- is it called slams?

MCELFISH: Yeah, we have that here.

HATHAWAY: -- in the high school, and then events using that with people participating in those. And they're very, very widely attended and popular.

POTTS: One of the things that we are asking with these summits that we're doing across the country is we're asking our folks in Parks and Recreation why is there a limited use of the fitness equipment and some of the programs aren't accessible to youth over the age of 13. And that's the question that they're starting to ponder -- why do you have to have a parent with you if you're under 16? If you could provide a training that would make them competent with equipment and give them access to a facility, that they could participate in a fitness program or use the facilities. At some point, we have to empower youth that they are mature and can make decisions. But yet, we see a lot of the rec. centers with limitations as what age you can be in there without a parent. And usually you have to be 18 or older or 16 or over.

HATHAWAY: Oh, really?

POTTS: It happens. And we're asking them what are the opportunities that can allow them to participate more and get them into the facility. It limits the access.

MCELFISH: And of course, if you need a parent, it totally defeats the purpose.

POTTS: So we're hoping that we can start asking questions and then prompt people to embrace what you can do in Parks and Recreation vs. posting the signs about what you can't do.

HATHAWAY: Very good. (laughs)

POTTS: We're real good about telling you what you can't do, but we're not so good about telling you about the possibilities of what you can do.

HATHAWAY: Yes.

KYLE: One of the things that I see in my work with youth and communities across the country is that in addition to the establishment and promotion of youth councils, advisor groups and decision-making bodies, both that are made up primarily of youth, we're also seeing that more of the cities' usual committees and commissions are being opened to youth participation and having youth appointed as members. And one of those is generally there is a recreation commission in lots of cities and towns. And I'm seeing that some youth are being appointed to those commissions. Have you seen any of that, Susan? And is that, even if you haven't, perhaps one way of having some of these issues getting better addressed because youth are there at the table helping to figure out what the recreation department policies and philosophies are?

POTTS: John, we're just starting to see it. We're just seeing only in the last probably six to eight months where I'm hearing staff come in and say that we just appointed a youth to our commission. And being really excited about that and the opportunity that they bring and looking forward to having that input and really feeling like, okay, I think I'm going to make some headway here with having this role at our commission table, that they can have a voice. So we're just starting to see that trend happen on a greater scale. I think it was probably there on a small scale, but it's just getting under way now. And we think it's going to be critical.

KYLE: I think it's interesting that it's -- in my experience, it's extending from smaller communities like Boise, Idaho, where they are appointing youth to every city commission that exists --

MCELFISH: -- Every city commission? Wow!

KYLE: Yes, and Nashville, Tennessee, which started with several and then added a few more, and one of the first ones they did I believe was recreation. So both very large places like a Nashville and places that all of us would be much smaller like a Boise are trying this out, and in more places than that. And as much as we might say that youth issues encompass a lot more than just what youth do during the day or in the afternoon or on weekends like recreation, nevertheless it is a big part of where they have something to say. They have a lot of experience and therefore have expertise about what's going on with activities for youth and recreation. So a recreation board or commission is a good place to appoint a youth. Library boards are beginning to do this as well. And it just ratchets it up another step beyond just having a youth council and looking at what city government is doing in general, but giving some particular decision-making roles to youth as full-fledged members of at least some of the commissions that exist in a city.

I want to let folks in the audience know that it's a good time to think about whether you've got a question for any of our panelists. We're going to continue our conversation, but remember that -- Crystal, tell me what the button is to push.

FACILITATOR: If you would like to ask a question, press “*1”.

KYLE: You can push “*1”, and if you decide to get out of line and give up your spot, press “#” and a little bit later in the call, Crystal will help me with navigating through getting some of your questions on air to the panelists.

I think I'd like to know a little bit further from Susan what kinds of things she's

seen as some of the most innovative or exciting things that a recreation department has done. What do you think is cutting edge, or you see less of it? Or regardless of how prevalent it is, you can tell from your conversations with recreation and parks officials that it's still one of the most exciting things that's going on? What are some of those things at the top of the list of exciting, innovative, good to do, always solid, exciting things?

POTTS: Probably the most innovative right now, that I think is kind of ironic, that I keep hearing about, is the re-introduction of kickball in youth leagues or older youth. Kickball is a sport -- I guess it's a sport -- that requires limited skill. And the leagues are really taking off. I keep hearing about it every state I've gone to the last couple of months is they are starting youth kickball leagues and really getting a great response from the youth to participate and to become active.

Another program that I think should be really implemented across the country, but it's only in Ohio right now, is mentoring -- a job coaching program where there are actually employees into park and recreation agency positions, primarily during the summer months because that's when kids are out of school. And really giving them some one-on-one job coaching and life skills and really giving them an opportunity over a three-year period to develop needed life skills and to develop a work ethic and to really making that contribution to a community. But also develop a peer group within other youth that are working in the same program that they are. Unfortunately, grant funding is so limited for this that they haven't been able to really take it on beyond a couple of sites. But it's really an opportunity for kids to really get some one-on-one positive coaching from adults. And it really has made an impact. And kind of a hokey term that we use in Parks and Recreation is that it "starts to grow our own." And we can develop future professionals in the field of Parks and Recreation when we can tap into youth that have been in programs in Parks and Recreation and continue to mentor them through working as a seasonal staff, and that mentoring happens. They end up usually coming back into the field of Parks and Recreation, or even Education, for that matter. And that's really exciting to see, when a youth really finds a knack with -- whether it's coaching Little League sports teams or participating in some of the work groups that we have as far as the maintenance crews. And really getting them excited about a profession that they can contribute to and give something back to the community and be proud that they're a staff member, working and contributing back. But also they're getting life lessons that perhaps otherwise they wouldn't have had.

MCELFISH: What age range did they hire in? Fifteen-year-olds? Sixteen-year-olds?

POTTS: They started at 15 years old and went up.

MCELFISH: Oh, excellent?

HATHAWAY: May I comment? So we haven't actually said the words "youth development" in this conversation, I think. But it's just so critical. We need that -- those are really good examples of the kinds of things that help young people identify their interests and develop skills that lead to future work possibilities. And the more we can do that, the better.

KYLE: Asking the same question that I asked Susan, Asha, but asking it a little bit differently -- from all of the things that you've heard other young people talk about in Fort

Worth or in neighboring communities, plus the opportunities you've had to talk to youth from across the country at conferences and things -- is there something in particular that stands out to you as being a unique and innovative, important kind of thing to offer to youth that people on the call might not have thought about that you've been hearing about that you'd like to see happen more? Whether Fort Worth is doing it right now or not -- but the point is that from your point of view as a youth -- as a young person yourself -- this is the kind of thing that would be important to offer.

MCELFISH: It sounds kind of small and obvious, but the city council's ears, basically -- if the city government would listen to what the youth have to say. Because more often than not, what we used to get out of youth town halls was the youth repeatedly said, "We're not being heard. You don't listen to us, and there is no voice around here that we have. You all make decisions without really consulting us" -- as a demographic, I guess you'd say. And so most importantly, if you have that body where it can give birth -- like my youth council, it's a resource for our city council. We advise them on youth issues specifically. So we go away and work on issues and come back and say, "Hey, look at this" or "Here's a new idea" and give it a new angle. And I think if more cities did that, they might not have the scale we have with 27 members, but even a small one, a committee, it would make a very big difference.

KYLE: One of the things that they're doing in Hampton, Virginia, which goes back to hiring youth and getting youth input, is they've hired two youth planners in the Planning Department. So there is a plan similar to what you all have developed in Santa Fe, as I understand it. "Here are our goals. Here are the things we'd like to achieve for youth in our community. Here's how long it might take us to get to it. Here's why we're doing it." But then those elements of that plan that specifically relate to youth are monitored by two youths hired in the Planning Department after school. One is a junior and one is a senior. And so there is the junior planner, who is a junior in high school, and the senior planner is a senior in high school. And so they're hiring one new one each year to replace the one who graduated. And their part-time job after school is to monitor whether the city Planning Department is doing its job or not in regards to the youth issues that are part of the plan. And they report not only to their bosses, but also report back to the youth council in Hampton so that youth can revise their plan or change their plan or lobby more heavily for their plan if it's not being well instituted. So it gives youth both a job about planning for youth, but at the same time, a way of having the voice of youth well represented. And I'm not aware of any other city that's hired youth in that kind of capacity, but I think it makes a real interesting example of where could you have a part-time job in city government that might have an impact on what there is for youth to do in the community.

POTTS: That's a great idea.

KYLE: Crystal, do we have any questioners -- any people online?

FACILITATOR: Yes, Sir, we do.

KYLE: Okay, let's take a question.

FACILITATOR: Okay, your first question comes from the line of Justin Cutler. Your

line is open.

QUESTIONER: Hi, my name is Justin Cutler, and I reside in Wilsonville, Oregon, a population of 16,000 people. And I think the young lady, she said that they had to close down a youth center because there was bad youth coming to the youth center. Is that correct?

MCELFISH: It wasn't in my own city. But I was talking to some kids from different youth councils, and I think it was Virginia actually.

QUESTIONER: Okay, so -- now by having a youth center, our goal is to get youth together. So how can we reach out to those "bad kids" and work them into our system or into the Parks and Recreation atmosphere in order to meet their needs? What are ways that you have found that have worked? Or what do you as a youth want to see in working with those types of youth?

KYLE: It's like a two-part question, Justin. Thanks for the question. And you can hang up and listen on. What we'd like to know more about, panelists, is I think partly how do we figure out how to effectively keep youth out who are disruptive? But more importantly, how do we bring youth who might be disruptive into a positive youth development -- using Lynn's word again? How can we figure out ways to program for them, to include them, as opposed to just kicking them out? Any experiences that any of the three of you have about that -- comments or advice to offer?

POTTS: I think the biggest thing that I would -- if I was a programmer, what I would do first and foremost is to do a council with youth on a center. But then also instill in them the opportunity to govern that center and allow them to identify what is acceptable and what is not. And my sense is from working with youth that they can do that through peer pressure. And when given that authority -- or empowerment is a better word -- that they can self-govern and do admonish unacceptable behavior. They know what's appropriate and what's not, and what they want. And I think it goes back to community building, what they want in their center and what they want the center to be for them and the values that they bring to the center and allowing them to determine what that is and what's acceptable for them and what's not. And supporting them in that discovery process is really critical for a community and allowing them to make determinations is a much-needed thing.

KYLE: I think one of the things that the caller was asking about -- and I think is something too often overlooked -- is that it's really wonderful to have a youth council in a community. Too often the youth councils are for only the good kids, only for the already-over-extended kids. They're for the A-students. They're for the captains of the teams. They're for the best students, the ones who are in all the arts societies. And people forget that there are other youth. And the way I like to phrase it often is the D- and F-students are going to vote also later on. So we don't just allow voting for the A-students, so why should we allow youth councils only for the A-students? And I think that part of the answer for a teen center where they are concerned about this is to take some of Susan's advice to heart, and that there ought to be some self-governing. How are the youth involved in this? How can they make the rules and how can they administer the rules? And that those rule-makers and admonishers aren't just the good students, but also include the students who are having difficulty.

I read recently about some young people who were asked to give advice to their school district about being absent from school without a good reason, being tardy, being truant. And what they realized was that the committee they asked to study it has never been truant. So getting a really good opinion of truancy was really difficult. Fortunately these young people were smart enough to figure that out and didn't just talk to themselves. But went out, asked high school principals to figure out how they could be in contact with students who were truant so that they got hearings with and advice from the truant students about what they should do about truancy. Well, I think it's the same kind of issue about teen centers. Talk to the young people who have either been disruptive, but you would like to bring back in, or who you think might be disruptive because of previous experiences with them and figure out what can we do that would make this more positive for you. And often it's just a matter of listening to them. Nobody has ever listened to them. And they've turned around and acted out. Most young people don't act out because of that. They were kind of neutral, or go away. But other youth act out. And it's a matter, I think -- the answer is often still the same -- establish a way for them to be involved and to be engaged.

MCELFISH: Mr. Kyle, actually, can I add to that? One thing I know that you were talking about -- how only the good kids are on the board. Well, typically I think it works out that way because they're the only ones who care or who have any interest in making the community better. I know a lot of high school students who when I've told them I'm on Youth Council, they're like, "Oh, well, like I'd ever be interested in that." And they see it as just a bunch of board meetings, which inevitably it is, but obviously there are things that come out of that. So you will inevitably get a semi-homogenous group.

I know our youth council, the people how put it together, it wasn't just a committee from our community relations department. We went to Council and said, "You all know kids in your district. Give us the best of your best. Send us the kids you want on the Council." So we got a very good cross-section that way from all over.

Also you were talking about youth empowerment. I think the reason why more cities -- or at least, I could see why my city -- would not be so keen on having youth run youth events on their own like that is they don't see the youth as being so self-governing, I guess. I think they see them as, it would get out of hand and turn into a sort of anarchistic situation. So that's just my opinion on that one.

KYLE: That's your opinion about what adults would think. Is that your opinion of what would happen if youth would have the opportunity for self-governing?

MCELFISH: No, probably not at all.

KYLE: And I think that's the point, that adults need to get beyond some preconceived notions about what youth can do. They also need to get -- we adults -- need to get beyond our self-proclaimed notions of who is the best of the best. Because the best of the best could be the D-student who is dropping out of school next year because you found out that putting on events is what they really know how to do. They don't know history. They don't know geography. They don't do well at English. But they really know how to get the best band. They know how to get all the decorations done. And they know how to market.

You could make a further argument that you need to know English in order to do that, and they may need some history and geography to do that as well. And I would agree

with that. But I think you start with the talent they have to offer. And I think in too many communities, we overlook the kids who are “not the best” who actually are the best at something -- we just haven’t figured out what they’re the best at yet. And the youth council abilities to have activities that might involve them or include them or reach out to them, or at least map and assess what their interests are, are not being done.

Crystal, let’s move on to another question, if we’ve got one.

FACILITATOR: Okay, your next question comes from the line of Steve Hennett. Your line is open.

QUESTIONER: Good afternoon. I wanted to say briefly, thanks to the National League of Cities for hosting the call, and to you, John, for moderating. It’s been a stimulating discussion.

I’m in Columbia, Missouri, and am coordinating an Americorps/VISTA program statewide.

MCELFISH: -- Yeah!

QUESTIONER: Yeah, and we are working to develop youth in governance and youth decision-making programs in local communities with VISTA. And my question today is for the whole panel. We’ve got a workshop next week with some various youth/adult teams coming in. And one of the topics we’re going to cover is working with municipal officials. I think here we have several cases where communities have youths who are very motivated and ready to see some things happen. But we’re finding that municipal officials, even staff, are obviously very busy in the issues that they’re working on. And it’s been difficult for some of these groups to kind of formalize their efforts, maybe organize under a city department or under a mayor. We have had some exceptions to that. But I’d just be curious how the panel might see or can provide some tips on working with municipal officials so that youth participation is more of a priority.

HATHAWAY: Well, maybe I should start. What has worked in our community is we generally had at least one city councilor who is very interested in youth issues. And if you can find a city councilor who is, they generally will lead you to a staff person or assign a staff person to the task. Have you tried that?

QUESTIONER: We have. But I guess part of the context is that we work with a lot of rural counties where council people and sometimes even staff are part time. So it is a matter of real busy schedules and trying to work within that.

HATHAWAY: Do you have anything like a maternal and child health council or something that might be more -- I guess Parks and Rec. would be the obvious one.

QUESTIONER: Parks and Rec. -- yeah.

POTTS: Have you approached them?

QUESTIONER: Well, I’m speaking from the perspective of a statewide coordinator. We

have certainly some examples of communities that have worked with Parks and Rec. I'm thinking of one rural community a few counties north of here where it seems like the youth -- well, the youth have formed an advisory council as a result of a leadership program. But they have not yet been able to get the buy-in from county commissioners or mayor or city council to kind of formalize their structure. So that was sort of underlying the question.

KYLE: I think one of the things for you and others listening is to make sure you're making good use -- especially in terms of municipal officials -- making good use of materials that the National League of Cities has. On our website are available an action kit designed specifically for municipal officials about promoting youth participation and trying to give in a brief way how these issues can be addressed and what examples are in other communities of varying sizes. Also being part of our listserv and getting updated on an ongoing basis about materials and activities that either we as National League of Cities sponsors or that municipal officials can avail themselves of.

Also try to network with other communities across the State of Missouri where there might be youth councils in existence, and that there is some common bond that even an smaller community can learn from a larger one. I think Americorps and VISTA itself has some resources, too, about positive youth development and engaging youth, and that there might be some examples and techniques that are there. But specifically, I think going to the NLC website at www.nlc.org/iyef and looking in the "Program Topics" area, and there are several sections under "Youth Development" that might give you some interesting ideas, including the Santa Fe Youth Plan that we were talking about earlier.

Crystal, are there other questions waiting?

FACILITATOR: Yes, Sir.

KYLE: In a minute we'll take one more question. And my panel should be thinking about, after we address this last question, some final remarks that you may want to make, a key bit of advice you'd want to give somebody listening to our call today. And also whether there is some publication or website or something that you would like to specifically refer them to for future information. So if you'll be thinking about a final closing thought, a bit of information, advice, etc. And Crystal, let's take our next question.

FACILITATOR: Okay, your next question comes from the line of Victoria Shaver. Your line is open.

QUESTIONER: Hi, this is Victoria Shaver in Anchorage, Alaska. And I'm with the Anchorage Youth Development Coalition. First of all, John, I just want to thank you for your comments about the D- and F-students, or even the C-students. In Anchorage, we have four organizations that have very youth-led programs. One is "Spirit of Youth" -- that's an amazing organization. The other is "Anchorage Youth Court (AYC)," which is probably one of the most youth-led youth courts, and one of the youth courts with the most responsibility as far as serious cases that come to the Anchorage Youth Court. The other is "Alaska Youth for Environmental Action (AYEA)." And the last one is "The Power Program," and they're pure outreach workers.

Only AYC and AYE are all volunteer. Power is a paid staff person for five young people. And I just want to say it makes a huge difference when a young person has

access -- like access to opportunities to be involved. Our mayor is really youth-friendly and has a position in his office as an internship for runaways that are clients of Covenant House. And that's been a tremendous success. So I just wanted to thank you for making sure to bring that up.

My question is, can you talk about communities that have youth coalitions that are working together to build a plan and engaging youth throughout the process? And not just asking them before or after the fact, but kind of finding creative ways to make sure youth are engaged throughout the process while respecting their time and not driving them to more board meetings? Thanks.

KYLE: Why don't you hang up and listen offline? Lynn, in particular, are there groups of youth-serving agencies or organizations in Santa Fe that you've been working with, or that even if you haven't been working with, have been working together? And has that come to pass?

HATHAWAY: Well, I think she was asking about creative ways to have youth involved in the planning process all the way along. We were not successful in having youth on our Children and Youth Commission. And what we are doing now -- we realized that we needed to go to them rather than have them come to our somewhat boring meetings. And so we have an annual needs assessment, and we do go to different -- have focus groups at different youth-serving agencies.

We also have something called the Youth Provider Coalition, which is made up of youth-serving organizations in the community. We meet once a month. And from time to time, youth from those programs are involved, or we would meet at those programs and meet with the youth that are there. We're working on a website, and I was working with two young men who were actually designing the website for me, since I didn't know how to do it.

Those may or may not be answers to your questions.

KYLE: Asha or Susan, do you want to comment about this question?

MCELFISH: Sure. I have a comment. I know that we decided originally before we ever had a youth council, the city put their heads together and had the same thought, and that's why we got the Youth Town Hall. And even though it's only once a year, it wasn't your standard boring board meeting. There were active sessions and people who didn't know each other got to know each other in a very quick period and got to talk about things like that. So I thought -- I mean, is that applicable, do you think?

HATHAWAY: Yes.

MCELFISH: So I know that as far as our city went, that's how they managed to keep youth in the process and in the loop. I honestly thought it should happen twice a year, but resources I think dictated that it couldn't.

KYLE: Susan, do you want to add something?

POTTS: Yeah, just real quick -- I think it's pretty important that we do a lot of education with our municipalities and our leaders that youth need to be at the table. And I think

sometimes adults have a real false perception that they know what's best for youth and what youth want and need. And I think sometimes their egos get in the way and I think it's critical that we reeducate folks on a regular basis of what youth bring to the table. And I think if we can make that position, then a lot of the barriers for success with youth coalitions and getting youth involved and commissions and being active would fall to the wayside, if folks really could embrace and really have an identity that they have a lot to bring to the table and a lot to offer every community across the country.

KYLE: I think that "reeducate" is an interesting choice of words. I think it's perhaps "educate." I think that it's pretty clear that most adults think that for youth to be involved in these ways that we've been talking about this afternoon, youth needs some education. And I would agree with that. There is some training and resources and information that youth are probably not likely to have in order to be effective participants in a coalition or on a council or in how city government works. At the same time, the adults in those situations probably also need some education.

POTTS: Absolutely.

KYLE: And it's a different kind of education, but it may be about what is youth development all about right now? And what is that -- you know, all the things that Susan just mentioned, but turned around as being part of a training curriculum for adults. I mentioned Nashville, Tennessee earlier as having appointed youth to a variety of city commissions and boards. And they didn't just train the youth. They trained the adults so that they would be better able to appreciate and make use of this new resource they have. They did some of the training themselves onsite and knew they would have to do it on an ongoing, regular basis. And they also used the techniques of having groups of adults who had vested interests bring youth with them and had an outside consultant come in and train a mixed group of youth and adults so that they were getting similar training and were experiencing it together at the same time.

This goes along with the similar event that NLC sponsored last fall in San Jose where we had a leadership academy and we wanted cities to participate. And every city that wanted to participate had to have one adult and one youth, and they needed to be submitted together and they needed to be separate applications, but they needed to be a team of an adult and a youth. We had 15 youths and 15 adults in that training, and it was a very interesting and effective way to get knowledge transferred on both sides of that so-called age divide.

We're past our allotted time and we're probably going to lose listening audience quickly. But we need to make one more pass around the three of you. What is your last piece of advice for youth and/or adults getting involve in answering the question, "There's nothing to do in my town." And if there is a resource in particular that you want to point -- website or an e-mail address or a publication -- it's your opportunity to do that. Can I ask Lynn to go first, and then Asha and then close out with Susan? Lynn, what's your last word?

HATHAWAY: Well, it was going to be -- you stole my line --

KYLE: -- We'll attribute it to you.

HATHAWAY: Okay -- adults -- I mean, it must be a common concern. I have been shocked to

be in a group with adults who were trying to ask students what their needs were. And the inability of the adults -- and these were caring adults who probably are parents themselves -- the inability of the adults to be able to ask the question in a respectful way.

KYLE: Asha, parting comments and any resource you might want to refer us to?

MCELFISH: I can't think of an actual website offhand that would be applicable to all of you. But as far as tapping into the community for kids, everyone always thinks "public schools, public schools, private schools." Don't forget your home schoolers. Coming from a home schooler -- it's a totally huge untapped resource in most communities. And these are people who are very hooked into the community -- huge networks of people who talk all the time and are totally forgotten by cities when they go and try to get the word out about youth events. So to all of you, absolutely tap into that resource. It is invaluable.

POTTS: Good advice.

KYLE: Susan, last word and resource?

POTTS: Last word -- when I think youth say there's nothing to do in this city, engage them in the conversation and be willing to actively listen to what they have to say and what they think is not there. And be open to hearing and working with them. I think listening is a missed opportunity that so many adults do on a regular basis with youth. If we listen a little bit more -- and really listen actively -- I think we can solve a lot of our communities' problems.

A website address that I would encourage folks to look at would be Project Adventure -- and it's pa.org -- for community building opportunities. And my e-mail is spotts@nrpa.org, and I'd be happy to answer any questions or comments.

KYLE: Great. This has been a wonderful call. I appreciate all of you -- Asha, Susan and Lynn -- thank you very much. The transcript of this call will be available in a couple weeks and posted on our website for you to have and to share with others.

Our next audioconference is on May 19 at 12:30 p.m. on Connecting School and Afterschool. And after that, June 16 on Strategies for Financing Local Initiatives, and that call is at 2:30 p.m. Today, you noticed, it started at 4:00 Eastern time. We're trying to move them around on the time because you all as listeners have asked us to do so.

And I also want to make sure you're aware that the 2005 summit on "Your City's Families" will be held in San Antonio September 25 to 28. Check our website at www.nlc.org/iyef for the latest information. Early Bird rates are still available, but will expire after May 15.

Thanks again. Closing out the call now -- a little late today, but hopefully it's been helpful to each and every one of you. Thanks again, Asha, Lynn and Susan -- appreciate it very much.