

Teen AFAP symposium gives voice to post youth

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Teens Kayla Roules and Kaylena Spears laugh while discussing topics at the Teen Army Family Action Plan conference Jan. 17. AFAP was designed to give servicemembers, Department of the Army civilians, spouses, family members and retirees a chance to voice concerns they have about their quality of life. Photo by Spc. Jennifer Rick.

January 21, 2009 – Each year Carlisle Barracks hosts an Army Family Action Plan symposium to hear from servicemembers, Department of the Army Civilians, spouses, retirees and family members about their quality of life in this military community.

A separate conference welcomed post teens to raise their concerns and brainstorm potential solutions to the problems. This first-time effort to create a special day for teens took place Jan. 17 at the Letort View Community Center.

The eight teens involved first had an open forum to talk about a variety of issues, and then vote on the three they felt were the most important. The teens brought up topics ranging from environmental issues to pets to pizza.

Once the top three issues were identified, the teens were asked to write about them, detailing exactly what the problem is, who it affects and a recommendation for how the situation could be improved. After going through what each had written, they chose the best one and combined it with key words and ideas from the others to make sure their ideas as a whole were expressed correctly.

"This is one of the most important things you can do," said Don Watkins of Child, Youth and School Services. Watkins was the facilitator for the event. "This is your opportunity to make a difference."

Linda Slaughter, post Army Community Service director, also stressed the importance of being involved.

"This is important not only to the teens here at Carlisle Barracks, but to teens all across the Army. Think globally – not just locally," she urged.

Laura Bremer and Justin Blackburn study the ideas the group had, and chose the ones they feel are the most important. The group chose issues regarding Youth Services and the Thorpe Gym as their top three issues. Photo by Spc. Jennifer Rick.



The group chose to focus on Youth Services, and talked about the staff and the dwindling number of kids that use the facility.

"There are really great things to do there – rock climbing, paintball trips – and no one goes," said Kaylena Spears.

Their recommended solution was to involve the most important people at Youth Services – the kids – in the hiring process. They bounced around ideas of adding questions for potential staff members to answer and the teen council president sitting in on interviews. They decided that the best solution is for new staff members to go through a trial period of two to four weeks, where they are being watched by the staff and the kids.

During this time, the new staff member would have time to get adjusted to the new environment and people. This would give everyone the ability to see if the potential staff member is fit for the job and the environment, and the kids would be able to give their input as well.

Another important issue to the teens is the building YS currently occupies. According to the teens, the building is small, and does not provide enough separation between the age groups that use it. The teens believe that the differences in age and maturity levels cause friction when they are all concentrated in one area.

The teens were told that Carlisle Barracks is approved to begin work on a new Youth Services facility that would help alleviate some of their problems.



Kyle Sheghan, a senior at Carlisle High School, discusses issues and potential solutions during the Teen AFAP conference. Photo by Spc. Jennifer Rick.



The teens' third discussion point was the Thorpe Gym policy that people must be 17 years old to use the free weight room. According to Kyle Sheghan, a senior at Carlisle High School, there are many teens on post who would love to use the weight room to prepare for the athletics they're involved in at school, but can't because of the age restriction.

"If we can use the weight room at school, why can't we use it here?" he asked. "A lot of people can't get down town to work out, and the gym here is within walking distance."

They proposed that at the age of 14, a teen could use the free weight room after having written parental consent, and going through a class where they would be shown the proper use of the equipment as well as important instructions for maintain their safety while working out.

The teens' issues and recommendations have will be briefed to the Carlisle Barracks senior leadership, along with issues from adults at the larger AFAP symposium. This conference is being held Jan. 21-23 at the LVCC. Local issues will be resolved on post, and larger issues will be forwarded to the regional level to be addressed.