

## Youth Discuss Policy and Plan Action at Leadership Academy



Top: Academy participants benefited from the chance to discuss issues with youth from different backgrounds. Bottom: A poster developed by the team from the Center for Advanced Research and Technology.

Should employers pay for health care? Should the minimum wage be raised? How can potential hazards be identified in the workplace? A group of concerned citizens recently grappled with these and other pressing questions relating to workplace health and safety. The heads brought together were not those of voters, of politicians, or of business people, but rather 25 teen-aged participants in the first Young Worker Leadership Academy (YWLA).

In February, the young people, drawn from a pool of 90 applicants, gathered at the 2-day Academy in Anaheim, sponsored by the California Partnership for Young Worker Health and Safety. The Academy was run by a dynamic team of trainers from the California Center for Civic Participation, COEH's Labor Occupational Health Program (LOHP), and its counterpart at UCLA, the Labor Occupational Safety and Health Program (LOSH), including peer educators from both Los Angeles and Berkeley.

A young worker was injured in the time it has taken the reader to get this far, and another is injured every 40 seconds. To address this unacceptable danger to youth, the YWLA sought to teach youth about workplace health and safety and their rights on the job, but, even further, to engage them to become empowered to participate in improving workplace safety. Academy youth were encouraged through various workshops to think about how to minimize the chances of getting hurt on the job, and to plan ways to take their understanding and ideas back

to their communities to promote young worker safety.

Perhaps the most exciting aspect of the Academy, according to organizer Diane Bush of LOHP, was the diversity of backgrounds among the participants and their enthusiasm for hearing the perspectives of youth with different opinions and life experiences. Discussions brought together white suburban youth, Mezteca youth from agricultural communities in the Central Valley, African-American youth in college-prep programs, and young activists from L.A. and Berkeley.

They applied as teams from the following organizations: the 49er Regional Occupational Program in Auburn; Se'e Savi in Madera; the Center for Advanced Research and Technology in Clovis; College Bound San Diego from San Diego; the Youth Evaluation Project formed by LOHP; and the Peer Education Project from LOSH. Adult mentors for each group also attended and participated in separate sessions to share ideas for supporting their youth teams in follow-up community activities.

Participants rated the Academy highly, but were a little exhausted by the packed agenda—and wanted more free time to spend together! They reported learning about the laws that protect them in the workplace and about how to speak up and respond to problems on the job. The teams suggested that the experience sparked new thinking about how to reach their peers with this information—ideas turned into actions after the Academy. Participants developed and presented materials to their peers during California's Safe Jobs for Youth Month in May, with projects including a video, a week-long lunch-period education series, and a poster contest.

With new funding from the Commission on Health and Safety and Workers' Compensation, the group plans to hold two Academies during the 2005–06 academic year, one each in Northern and Southern California. For information about next year's academies, contact Diane Bush at [dbush@berkeley.edu](mailto:dbush@berkeley.edu), (510) 643-2424. ☎