



Opinion: Teen's prepared voices can be powerful in a divided age

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Just over two months after March for Our Lives saw hundreds of thousands of people rally for safer communities, teens from Parkland to Chicago have rallied to demand change and action for everything from safer schools to registering to vote. These young people have shown us we don't have to wait to make a difference – everyone, no matter what age, is empowered to raise a voice and create a better future.

Coming out of this tragedy, youth around the country have ignited a flame of energy and empowerment that will change the world for future generations. Throughout history we've seen young people stand up to demand their voices are heard on issues having a major impact on their lives.

On Friday, Atlanta hosted 2,000 teen leaders who are rallying together to be change-makers at Boys & Girls Clubs of America's 51st Annual National Keystone Conference.



the guidance of youth development professionals, Keystone provides opportunities for academic success and college and career preparation. Aaron's has been the lead sponsor of the Keystone program for the past four years and as the president of Aaron's Foundation and as a former Club kid from the Boys & Girls Clubs of Athens, I've seen firsthand the impact these teens have in their communities when we equip them to promote change.

This year's conference theme was, "What's the Move? Ignite Change." It spoke to the power of teens' collective voice to create change. Throughout the weekend, teens engaged in leadership workshops, discussed issues in their communities, developed skills to enhance their service and attended presentations by notable thought leaders.

Throughout this past year, and across the nation, Keystone teens developed service projects aligned with the National Keystone Project theme United We Stand. Keystone Club members were asked to assess the ethnic, racial and religious climate in their communities, then develop service projects to encourage tolerance and diversity. This is no small matter. Boys & Girls Clubs across the nation serve a diverse population, with members belonging to many racial, ethnic and religious groups.

In Menlo Park, California, teens at Boys & Girls Clubs of the Peninsula teamed up with local officials to create a learning experience called "Don't Stop Dreaming." Inspired by the work of Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., "Don't Stop Dreaming" educates youth about civic participation and pathways to elected office, trains them to inform peers of their civil rights and liberties and empowers them to be agents of justice and unity in their communities. In March, Keystone teens hosted Dream Summit 2k18, a one-



In Las Vegas, seeking to make “all teens feel safe no matter their gender, race, ethnic background or sexual preference,” teens at Boys & Girls Clubs of Southern Nevada became involved with their local LGBTQ community. After attending the Las Vegas PRIDE Parade, they painted a wall mural representing and dedicated to the diversity that all teens are accepted and welcome in the club.

And right here in Atlanta, Keystone teens from Boys & Girls Clubs of Metro Atlanta invited community leaders and local high schools to collaborate on how to create an inclusive environment in their communities. This gave Atlanta area teens a chance to speak up and begin conversations of diversity and differences with each other.

With teens like these, we are confident about the future. Aaron’s supports the Keystone teen leadership program– we’re excited to equip the 2,000 teens who attended the conference in Atlanta this weekend and we know they will return to their hometowns across the country inspired and ready to effect change.

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