

# Youth Leadership Program Shows Promise, State Says



Photo by Erik Howard

Peer educators, including Gary Cooper (face shown), link hands outside the program's location on Rosa Parks Blvd.

Youth United, our youth leadership development program, has received an \$88,500 grant and recognition as a promising practice by the Michigan Department of Community Health (MDCH).

"We are pleased that Youth United is increasingly being regarded as a model to help young people in the juvenile justice system or dealing with difficult psychosocial issues reintegrate into society and work toward a better future," said Joseph Tardella, executive director of Southwest Counseling Solutions (SWCS). "The grant allows us to continue and expand the program."

The federal block grant, administered by MDCH, is

intended to fund innovative, consumer-run, culturally sensitive and evidence-based programs that are transforming the system of care by enabling individuals to recover and lead fulfilling and contributing lives.

Youth United met all these criteria, and impressed the MDCH with its positive outcomes and its presentation. Part of the presentation was a short and creatively designed book written by program youth and staff members, and featuring photographs by Erik Howard, a former leader of the program. The book is called "WE."

The goal of Youth United is to

empower troubled youth to turn their lives around, realize positive values, and become leaders and mentors. The program is part of Children, Youth and Family Services, one of SWCS's Centers of Excellence. The centerpiece of Youth United is the Peer Education program, where youth who have changed their lives help other youth to do the same. Youth facilitate group learning activities and outings, mentoring relationships, community outreach projects, talent shows, and other events designed to help youth increase their voice and be a positive force in the community.

The block grant, combined with other funding, will allow Youth United to hire additional staff, strengthen and expand youth

leadership training, help establish a youth leadership council to advise the Wayne County System of Care, and help develop a youth center in southwest Detroit.

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**"Our peer educators come from all walks of life... Each one brings a unique personality to the group that helps our efforts. With so much experience under our belt, helping out in the community has become second nature!"**

*- Leon Vaughn  
from the book "WE."*

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