

Young Entrepreneurs Bring Real Change to UF Campus, Community

Gainesville, Fla. –More than 50,000 students started school at UF last week, but 23 very special high school students got a head start on them this summer.

Those students declared themselves agents for change, as they participated in the second annual Young Entrepreneurs for Leadership and Change (YELC) Program, offered by UF's Center for Entrepreneurship & Innovation (CEI). During those six weeks, YELC students took two college-level courses, "Exploring Entrepreneurship" and "Social Problems and Solutions," and expanded their knowledge of entrepreneurship, social entrepreneurship, and leadership. They also set the bar for UF students working to meet President Machen's goal of contributing 1 million minutes of service. In just six weeks, the 23 YELC students performed more than 2,025 hours – that's 121,500 minutes – of community service, adding up to a whopping 12 percent of the university's total goal!

Working in four teams, the YELC students volunteered with local nonprofit organizations. Did you adopt a kitten this summer? You may have been assisted by a Blue Team member – they helped out at the Alachua County Humane Society, working with the animals and helping with adoptions. The Orange Team proved you're never too young to lend a helping hand to a smaller one, volunteering at Small World Daycare (in partnership with the Alachua County Early Learning Coalition), where they helped with renovations and spent quality time interacting with pre-K children from disadvantaged backgrounds. The Red Team also demonstrated that youth possesses its own wisdom, providing Life Skills lessons for participants aged 11-15 at the Dignity Project, which aims to educate and empower at-risk youths. They also got to witness first-hand the empowerment of individuals who received vehicles, as well as those who made them road-ready, through the program. And, with so many struggling to afford groceries and other basics these days, the Green Team provided practical community support as they organized a successful bake sale and school supply drive for Harvest of Hope, a foundation that works with migrant farm workers and their families. The experience of working with the same agency on a daily basis for six weeks gave the students the perspective to truly understand the needs of each organization, as well as the opportunity to put into action the entrepreneurial innovation and creative-thinking skills that they learned in class.

Besides these daily projects, the entire group worked together on five Saturdays, including volunteering at the Springs Celebration with Watershed Action Volunteers, creating a butterfly garden and Children's Trail at Ichetucknee Springs State Park, and cleaning up the Hoggetown Creek with Current Problems, among other activities. These projects helped to bring them together as a group, provided great contributions to the community, and taught them about the importance of environmental sustainability and civic engagement to complement the program's focus on entrepreneurship, leadership, and creating positive social change. The students also had the opportunity to work with a number of successful entrepreneurs in Gainesville, who helped inspire and empower them to become entrepreneurs and leaders – and, of course, future Gators. If you are interested in taking part in the 2009 Program, please visit: www.ufyoungentrepreneurs.org or contact Dr. Kristin Joos at kristin.joos@cba.ufl.edu.

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