



Teens venture well beyond 'I'

Interns learn to reach out to other young people during a life-changing summer.

By ERNEST HOOPER

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Leena Hasbini learned the value of a work ethic, time management and multitasking.

Camille Jacobs and Caitlyn Oser discovered that suburban life is not rosy for every boy and girl.

Sharone Dexter realized that personal involvement can make a difference.

The four east Hillsborough teens were among a group of 10 youths who earned eight-week internships through Bank of America's Student Leaders program. This week, they shared their experiences about the program, and clearly they won't soon forget the lessons learned this summer.

Hasbini, a Newsome High graduate who will attend the University of South Florida, interned with Community Tampa Bay and quickly learned about the challenges of working for a nonprofit group.

"You have to learn what your resources are," Hasbini explained. "If you don't have any resources, you have to create resources because that's how you get stuff done."

Hasbini handled an array of duties for Community Tampa Bay, a group that promotes dialogue and respect among different cultures, religions and races. One of her biggest tasks involved creating a forum for Brandon area teens.

That event comes to fruition Saturday with the Teen Summer Bash, from 3-7 p.m. at the Brandon Family Support and Resource Center, 1277 Kingsway Road. The idea: Get kids to brainstorm about activities for teens.

"I think our ultimate goal ... is to have a center where teens could come in and do a movie night or get dinner - somewhere where they could gather and not be on the streets," Hasbini said.

Jacobs, a Durant High graduate, and Oser, a Bloomingdale High graduate, said they certainly think area teens could use more activities. But after interning at the Bill Carey Boys & Girls Club this summer, they know that youths in this community have a number of needs.

Both spent their days working with young children at the club. That some of the kids have incarcerated parents, abusive fathers and difficult home lives was eye-opening.

"They would come to the table and start chatting about the drama," said Oser, who will join Jacobs as a University of Florida freshman in a few weeks. "I just tried to lead them in the right direction. That's something I would never forget, having someone come up and spill their hearts out."

Added Jacobs: "I just listened. Eventually, I realized I wasn't there for myself. I was there for the kids."

Dexter had a similar experience at the West Plant City Boys & Girls Club. She bonded with a group of 5- to 7-year-olds, and made a special connection with a boy who is partly deaf.

"Everybody would pick on him," said Dexter, who will start at Tallahassee Community College before transferring to Florida State. "They isolated him like he wasn't normal. By the second week, he was attached to my hip.

"On my last day, I cried and I cried. The one who was deaf, he cried and he made me cry."

A panel of judges helped select 10 Hillsborough winners from nearly 100 applications. The teens didn't realize how the internships would change their perspectives, but they certainly know it now.

Dexter captured the sentiment of the group when she said, "Overall, it wasn't what I expected, but in a way, it was so much better."

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