



From Bystander to Upstander: HRA Hosts Event to Promote Healthy Teen Relationships

On Friday, May 16, HRA welcomed professionals from schools, community groups, libraries and other organizations that work with teens for a day of workshops and networking focused on promoting healthy youth environments and behaviors. Cecile Noel, Executive Deputy Commissioner of HRA's Emergency Intervention Services (EIS); Connie Marquez, Deputy Director of STEPS to End Family Violence; and Rosemonde Pierre-Louis, Commissioner of the Mayor's Office to Combat Domestic violence, welcomed attendees to the event, which featured breakout sessions on cultivating healthy individual behaviors and promoting supportive environments for teens, as well as opportunities to network and share best practices.



Presenters and Organizers of the From Bystander to Upstander Event

The session on cultivating healthy individual behaviors focused on how best to be an Upstander, someone who assists and intervenes when others are being harassed, rather than a passive bystander. Participants were asked to imagine being a bystander in scenarios such as youth on the way to an LGBTQ event being threatened on the subway, or high school cheerleaders being harassed on the way to a school event. The presenters asked attendees to always be careful of their own safety, and that intervening doesn't have to be direct confrontation – finding ways to distract an aggressive person or comfort a victim after a confrontation can both be ways of being an Upstander. Presenters shared the acronym SAFE as an approach to addressing these situations: Stand up, Ask how you can help, Follow up, and Empower.

In the session on promoting supportive environments, attendees were asked to consider the spaces they had for talking with teens about potentially difficult subjects like bullying, harassment and abuse, and what the ideal safe space might look like. Factors like privacy, relatability and personality all matter to making teens feel at home. Promoting safe spaces can also include cyberspace, and presenters discussed how to get teens involved and create spaces where they feel safe from online harassment.

Representatives from HRA's Teen Relationship Abuse Prevention Program (RAPP) played a large role in the event. RAPP works with NYC teens to help them distinguish between healthy and unhealthy relationships and recognize that they deserve to be respected. RAPP is a school-based program, offering

classes and counseling in over 60 middle and high schools throughout the city. Other organizations presenting at the event included STEPS to End Family Violence, The Door, CAMBA, Hollaback!, DoSomething.org, Day One, the NYC Alliance Against Sexual Assault, the Center Against Domestic Violence, and the NYC Department of Education (DOE).