

Union County Vo-Tech School: Simon Youth Academy Participant Focus Group

01/18/2023 10:30am – 12:00pm

6 students participated in the focus group

Jasmin Lee, Supervisor/ Academy Leader (Simon Youth Academy)

The youth were asked a series of questions that focused on the following topics:

- Experience in the workforce
- Future aspirations
- The difference between traditional school versus Simon Youth Academy
- Mental health, LGBTQ, and homeless services

The youth were candid about their experiences and felt comfortable expressing their challenges and desires for their future. With the encouragement of Jasmin Lee, the students were frank about their reasons for leaving a traditional school setting and why they are thriving at Simon Youth Academy.

1. How do you define success?

- Being rich
- Helping people change their lives

2. What jobs are you familiar with or have worked in?

- Retail
- Restaurants
- Church

3. What are your experiences in the work world?

- Working too many hours
- Overwhelmed with work, school and personal life
- Employers give us too many hours and do not hire staff
- Unstable schedules

4. What are some of the careers you see yourself in?

- Working with kids in an alternative school
 - Truck driver
 - Cosmetology
 - Working at the church
 - Looking for internships with Dr. S
5. Do you know how to get into that career?
- Yes Mrs. Lee helps us
6. What help do you need to get and keep a job?
- Someone who can push us
 - Someone who motivates us to get a job
7. Do you know where to go to find help with getting a job?
- Mrs. Lee and school staff
8. What are some of your supportive services needs?
- Transportation passes, Uber, driving school, uniforms
9. What are your experiences with various programs that are supposed to help you?
- Some don't really care to help people
10. Have you or someone close to you experienced homelessness?
- No answer
11. What do you like/dislike about school?
- Dislikes Public School
 - Don't like switching classes

- Public school too big
 - Get lost in the crowd
 - Felt like teachers didn't care
- Likes Simon Youth Academy
 - Smaller group
 - Talk more to teachers
 - Do more work but teachers are there to help

12. How can schools prepare you for the future workforce?

- Understanding what jobs are available
- Teach you how to invest money in the stock market

13. How can those in the LGBTQ community feel safe at home, school, and in the workplace?

- Offering a safe space
- By treating everyone the same, doing something to make people included, makes them feel excluded

14. Do you know where to go to find mental health services? Where?

- School,
- Dr. S,
- Church
- Don't like regular therapy or Trinitas Hospital services

Other Comments that were shared by the youth students

- Going to school in the mall has many benefits, especially finding a job.

- Many students felt uncomfortable advocating for themselves and relied on school staff to guide them or speak to employers on their behalf.
- All the students agreed they need staff who will care, motivate and help them to do things such as getting a driver's license or help them with work/college applications.
- Many students talked about being inspired by the staff at Simon Youth Academy, which has led them to want to help youth in the future.