



CHAnge-makers

Reggie Hatley never dreamed he'd be advising CEO's at age 16. He never thought he'd be making policy recommendations for the city of Chicago as a high schooler. But this past summer, the high school junior found himself doing exactly that, researching what youth in this city really need and advising on how to actually make it happen.

Hatley is currently one of 20 young CHA youth who this year joined the inaugural CHA Youth Council sponsored by Mikva Challenge. The council has spent the last several months identifying practices and policies that could better the lives of CHA youth, and Hatley has loved every minute of it.

"Mikva looked very cool and I felt like it was an experience that I could learn from," said Hatley, who is a Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) holder from the Burnside neighborhood. "This is not like any other job in the world! We get our work done and have fun at the same time. I feel like I'm a part of something special and I've met people like me that want to make Chicago a better place."

This summer, the 20 youth council members spent hours researching the current state of youth employment in the city. Through interviews with experts and peers, extensive panel discussions and the evaluation of existing youth programs, the council identified feasible and exciting solutions to fill the gaps that exist in their communities.

"We talked with our peers to understand what they're interested in. Our goal was to create something meaningful and specific to youth that hasn't been done before and doesn't already exist."

The council met with the CEO of the CHA Eugene Jones Jr. five times throughout the summer, and their comprehensive research culminated in five policy recommendations that were presented to the CEO in August. Their recommendations included a mobile STEAM lab equipped to provide a wide variety of courses ranging from cooking to coding. Other ideas included creating a Youth Development Board that assists architects, designers and developers with planning and space utilization that represent the needs of CHA youth, or partnering with local professional teams, athletic corporations and local universities to connect youth with coaching, sports medicine and field/court maintenance employment opportunities.

"CEO Jones really liked all of the ideas," Hatley said. "We got great feedback, and we will be selecting one idea to focus on and implement in the coming year. My favorite part of Mikva is that I feel empowered to say how I feel. I know my voice matters and I now know how to make changes in my community."

The Council has also spent their time this year fundraising and coordinating a city wide youth summit happening December 3rd at Jones College Prep. The YOUth Rule Chicago Summit will bring together young people from across the city to collaborate on the best ideas for improving Chicago. Youth will have a chance to work as a team to pitch an idea to a panel of professionals who will grant up to \$1200 toward the implementation of the best proposals.

As for Reggie Hatley, he's used his time on the council to network with engineering professionals, university professors and college students in the engineering field. His experience on the council has helped him solidify this commitment to a firm career path and he plans to start applying to colleges in the coming year.



Reggie Hatley, high school junior and HCV holder, collaborating with CHA Youth Council members over the summer on policy proposals.