



Alexis's Speech

Good evening. My name is Alexis Ramos. I'm 17 years old. For the past year I've worked as a Somerville Youth Organizer. I applied because I was really concerned. This feeling started six years ago when it seemed like almost every day some teenager in Somerville was dying from an overdose or suicide.

This hit me very personally when my close friend Melissa died. I first got to know Melissa as my babysitter when I was four years old and over the years we became good friends. Before she started doing heroin she was outgoing and smart, a fun person to be around who made all these jokes and brought a lot of happiness into my life. Then I lost touch with her. I heard that she was involved with a guy who introduced her to heroin and the next thing I know she was gone.

About three years after Melissa's death, I started to hang out at Trump Field where I would see so many kids getting messed up; drinking, doing pills, smoking pot, and shooting heroin. When this was happening, I would stay in the background watching and wondering why they would be doing these things that were going to hurt them.

I wanted to do something about these problems, but I didn't know how. Then I got the job at TE. Now I work with a group of teens that talk about the issues that we face. Then we create events and meetings where we hold discussions and use poems, plays, songs, speeches, and raps that tell about our experiences. We let other youth know how we feel about these experiences and what we can do to stop people from making the same mistakes over and over again.

But our work is not just about getting youth to listen. It is also about getting people in positions of authority to hear what we have say. This past month we organized a lobby day at the state house to talk with the legislators about school reform. I was nervous about doing this, but when I arrived there were over 200 other youth there who had come to help us make our voices heard.

That day I spoke to Representative O'Flaherty who really didn't want to hear what is going on in our schools, but we told him anyway. He kept shooting down everything we were saying, but we kept pushing our point that not everybody is good at tests and that we need better schools.

I think it is so important that adults start acting like they care about us and listening to what we have to say. I believe when this happens there will be a lot less kids dropping out of school and getting involved with drugs.

Teen Empowerment gives us hope and confidence that things can change. Then we give other youth and adults the hope and confidence they need to make changes happen. We are doing this so that my generation and the next won't have to grow up with negativity all around them and will be able to get the chances they deserve.



Randy's Speech

Hi, my name is Randy Cannon. I'm 16 and I live in Dorchester. A few years ago, I was looking up to the wrong people. These people had big gold chains, fancy cars, and they didn't even go to school. This led me to wonder why I should bother going to school when I could just hang out with these guys and have a good time.

Back then, I would get into fights just to show people that I was somebody that should be taken seriously. Then, this one time I beat this guy up and didn't think much about it until I heard that he was going to shoot me. That's when I figured I should get him before he gets me. So I went to my guys and asked them for help. A bunch of people rode bikes over to where he hung out and started shooting. To tell you the truth, I don't even think he was out there. Luckily, nobody got hit.

Then about a year later, I found out my friend Piggy had been set up during a drug deal and been killed. He was like an older brother to me and now he was gone. At first, I wanted to go out and get the people that did this. But then my older brother explained that if I did, I would be putting our whole family in danger.

Then last spring, I went to Teen Empowerment's Peace Conference. There I saw all these kids speaking about violence and their needs for jobs and other things. But the thing that got me the most was when this guy Terrell spoke. You see, like me, he got involved in gangs and he thought nobody could ever hurt him, but he ended up paralyzed and having to live the rest of his life in a wheelchair.

A few weeks later, I heard that TE was hiring. So I went through the interviews and got the job. If I hadn't got this job there is a really good chance that I would be in jail now or dead. But instead, I'm using my voice to try to make things better.

A lot of you have probably heard of the Boston Miracle. That was a time in the 90's when crime in Boston went way down. In fact, for over two years there was no one under the age of 18 who was killed and there was almost 7 years when there was hardly any violence. Back then there was money to hire youth to do the kind of work that I do, and it really helped. Then in 2002, Governor Romney cut that money and crime slowly increased to where today everybody I know has lost someone.

This is not the way it should be. I am here tonight not only to support Teen Empowerment, but to ask you to help get other people, and especially important people, to understand that getting youth to be leaders is not just a nice idea, but that it will save lives.

Just imagine what would happen if there were 500 youth in Boston like me that understand right from wrong and were willing to stand up for it. That's a dream I hope I live to see come true.



Sable's Speech

Good evening, my name is Sable Covil. I'm 18 years old. For the past five months, I've worked as a Teen Empowerment Youth Organizer.

Before I got this job, I wanted to get any kind of income that I could get to help my mother. Now, I see myself working as a community activist or as a lawyer so that I can help deal with the devastating problems that exist all around us. And while it might sound like a cliché to talk about the importance of youth voice, as an inner city youth who has experienced the consequences of not being heard, I know that giving youth a voice is one of the most important things that can be done to improve our country.

You see, I began life with a lot of things that made it hard for me. When I was about two months old I went to live with my aunt because my mother was on drugs. By the time I was two years old my mother was in recovery so I returned home. But that was not the end of my struggles, because my father died from an illness when I was seven. In addition, I struggled with an educational system that was not equipped to deal with some of the problems I faced. I spent 12 years in and out of many different schools trying to find something that would work for me.

So there I was at the age of 18 just getting back into school and feeling like there was nothing to get up for in the morning. I was facing a life filled with dead-end jobs with no possibility to use the talents that I knew in my heart I had. When I first saw a flyer for Teen Empowerment, I didn't know what it was, but I did know it was job that paid \$9.75 an hour, so I applied. But after I started working for TE I went from feeling like all I faced were limits, to seeing a new path for my life.

This happened because I got a chance to be in a group where we spoke about important issues like teen pregnancy, drugs, violence, education, and the CORI laws. I was able to write a speech about marijuana where I told my peers that it is a diversion from life. Then I gave a speech about my experience with crack cocaine where I explained how it affects not only those who use it, but also those who sell it, and those who have to live in the communities where this devastation happens. Then I gave a speech on education reform at the State House where I spoke against standardized tests and an educational system that does not provide for the needs of inner city students. I also got a chance to use my skills as a rapper and as an actor to communicate a brighter vision for the world.

And now I am here to challenge everyone to look beyond the surface images and see the potential that inner city youth have to contribute to society. We need schools that are welcoming and organized to help us find our strengths. We need a judicial system that gives us a fair chance and forgives small mistakes so that we can get a decent job. Most of all we need a society that gives everyone regardless of their race, class, and age a chance to find their voice, be heard and use their talents to their full potential.

When this kind of investment is made in us, I assure you we will repay it many times over by helping to create a better world. Thank you so much for coming here this evening and for supporting our work.