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School Safety Conference Tackles Tough Issues

On October 29-31, 2007, at the historic Hotel Washington in downtown Washington, DC, the Hamilton Fish Institute on School and Community Violence (HFI) successfully hosted its annual National Conference on Safe Schools. This conference is one of the many vehicles that the Institute uses to accomplish its mission to develop safe schools where all students can excel.

Designed to be a relatively small and intimate gathering to facilitate knowledge

exchange, this year's conference attracted more than 300 participants from 41 different states and as far away as America Samoa and Alaska. These educators, researchers, police officers, policymakers, juvenile justice professionals, ex-offenders, youth workers, supporters of healthy children, youth, and families, and students both shared and gathered knowledge and resources about new ways to address issues related to the safety and welfare of young people, our children, our future. ■

Towards Safe and Secure Schools

The Hamilton Fish Institute was honored that so many leaders in the field of violence abatement agreed to take time from their hectic schedules to speak to the participants at its 2007 National Conference on Safe Schools. The following are highlights of their remarks.



J. Robert Flores

(Administrator, U.S. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice)

"We should be agents for change for our youth, but in doing so we must make sure that this change does not create other problems, as is the case with zero tolerance policies. Many of them have turned misbehavior into criminal acts, and as a result, increased the number of children, especially minority children, being referred to the juvenile justice system.

We don't have a juvenile justice problem

in this country, we have an adult problem. We need to recognize that children are sometimes not capable of making good decisions and often need more adult intervention. Our children need our guidance and protection. They are worth it for they are one of our nation's most valuable resources. Always keep in mind that our economy is dependent on our children being strong and able to carry on."



Cybele K. Daley

(Acting Assistant Attorney General, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice)

"School violence is on the decline and our schools are among the safest places for children. But you would never know this from the media, which gives almost limitless coverage to violent incidents such as the killings at Virginia Tech and Nickel Mines, but rarely if ever report statistics that show that school

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Executive Director's Corner

What a conference! What a conference! What a good conference! That's the feedback that we received from conference attendees, both verbally and on our participant survey. We are pleased that we were able to bring together individuals, including young people, who share a deep concern about safety and security in our schools and communities.

We were able to provide participants the unique opportunity to interact with renowned experts who, in turn, had access to an audience with which to share and gather feedback about their latest research, theories, models, approaches and solutions to violence prevention.

Over the course of the conference, participants were afforded the opportunity to network and interact, not only at the three luncheons, workshops, and numerous breaks, but also at several informal networking dinners at the conclusion of the first two days of the conference. In addition to this, vendors of school safety-related products and programs, with which we at the Institute are familiar, were on site for two full days.

We are sure that the participants at this year's conference left thinking about new ways to address violence prevention and provide safe schools and communities for all. We have already received feedback, insight, and strategies from participants who will help the Institute do a better job in its effort to disseminate new knowledge, develop new violence prevention strategies, and evaluate new and emerging programs. We do indeed listen to suggestions and implement them! For example, we are working on ways to decrease minority

contact with the juvenile justice system. There will be more about this in future newsletters.



Beverly Fagan

Towards Safe and Secure Schools, Continued from page 1

violence is at its lowest level in a decade.

Obviously we must be doing something right if school violence is going down. And we at the Office of Justice Programs (OJP) think that strengthening and expanding our partnerships with youth and youth-serving organizations is one of the things that we are doing right. One of our programs that facilitate this goal is our Youth Court Initiative. OJP's support of mentoring programs like Big Brothers/Big Sisters, Boys and Girls Clubs, and the Police Athletic League also facilitates our goal along with our community service programs that allow youthful offenders to learn about the law and many other areas through hands-on experience.

I believe that heightening the role of youth responsibility and service will lead to many good things like reduced recidivism, fewer referrals back to courts, and increased volunteerism. By supporting and working closely with our youth, we expose them to the knowledge, skills, and attitudes they will need in order to assume the most important role in our society—that of a citizen."



Mary Hatwood Futrell

(Dean, The George Washington University, Graduate School of Education and Human Development)

"In our democracy we all have a responsibility to ensure the safety and well-being of our children as they pursue their right to an education. But, we have cause to wonder whether we are succeeding in light of the tragedies that occurred at Virginia Tech, the one-room Amish School in Nickel Mines, Pennsylvania, the execution-style murder of three friends behind an elementary school in Newark, New Jersey, and the shooting rampage of a troubled youth in Cleveland, Ohio. These incidents cause us to ask ourselves, "Are we doing enough to curb violence?" and "How can we do a much better job with our present resources?"

When it comes to creating a safe environment where all children can excel, we are facing many challenges. We need to ask ourselves: "How do we make school violence a priority action item on the radar screen of our nation?" and "How can we,

as those on the frontline, mobilize our national leaders, our national, state, and local legislators, school officials, parents, care-givers, and community leaders into a cooperative and collaborative effort to exercise immediate action about youth and school related violence?"

Certainly, if it is our nation's resolve to conquer outer space, then undoubtedly it should be our nation's resolve to ensure a safe school environment for our most precious and vulnerable citizens. I hate to think of our future if we do not solve the problem of youth violence against themselves and others. Together we should resolve to change our individual practice and that of our political and social leaders so that solutions to the problem of youth violence can be found."



Deborah A. Price

(Assistant Deputy Secretary, Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools, U.S. Department of Education)

"Parents, students, educators and other members of the community are rightfully concerned for the safety of our children. They want to ensure that all of America's schools continue to be safe places for children to learn and grow. And, I am happy to report that the Office of Safe and Drug-free Schools (OSDFS) continues to focus on creating and fostering environments and communities where teachers can teach and students can learn.

We strive to provide tools whereby an academic environment conducive to success can be fostered. To do this we take a comprehensive approach that looks at the whole student and the entire community. We do not want our students to merely feel safe—that is not enough—we want, and need, them to thrive physically, mentally and socially, as well as academically.

One of our most innovative grant programs—Safe Schools/Healthy Students—has collaboration braided throughout it. It involves a community approach for creating safe and drug-free learning environments that promote healthy childhood development. Recently, we funded nearly \$5 million to help schools increase student access to mental health care by linking schools with local mental health sys-

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Students Reflect on Their Conference Experience

by Lauren Ray, Bibi Robbins, Kristina Smith and Donna Smith



FCCLA students, Lauren Ray, Bibi Robbins, Kristina Smith and Donna Smith of Oklahoma attended the Hamilton Fish 2007 Conference on Safe Schools in Washington, D.C., October 28-31 at Hotel Washington. One student member and one adult were awarded a grant to attend and present a FCCLA STOP the Violence project. The grant was generously provided by The Hamilton Fish Institute.

The project dealt with bullying, relationship abuse and the support group TEAN - Teens Ending Abuse Now. The project was presented to conference attendees from across the nation. The audience showed a great deal of respect for what the students had accomplished in Bixby schools and interest in taking the ideas back to their communities.

While in Washington, the Bixby group was also able to meet Senators Tom Coburn and Jim Inhofe from Oklahoma. They were also given a tour of the Capitol building with an intern from Congressman John Sullivan's office, including the House Floor.

The group visited several historical sites as well. Among those visited were: the Holocaust Museum, the Museum of Natural History, the National Archives,

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Two HFI Partner Groups Convene Statewide Planning Meetings

Two key national organizations—National Organizations for Youth Safety (NOYS) and the National Association of Youth Courts—co-located their membership meetings with the National Conference on Safe Schools via an ongoing partnership with the Hamilton Fish Institute. Participants in these two meetings attended the conference general sessions and then met separately to organize and plan. The Institute sponsored both meetings by covering registration, transportation, and lodging.

Establishing Statewide Youth Court Associations

Over 30 youth court staff and volunteers, from eight different states across the U.S. participated in a separate training on establishing a State Youth Court Association/networking groups/training.

The objectives of the training were to:

- Identify the advantages of forming state youth court associations.
- Determine the purpose for organizing youth courts on a state level.
- Identify various structures for state youth court associations.
- Determine resources and professional development opportunities available to assist with program management issues.
- Discuss common challenges to association development and management and identify strategies for overcoming these barriers.
- Identify the top 5 - 10 challenges to managing a state youth court association.

Participants were engaged in working together as an entire group and then a dedicated amount of workshop time was given to each state group to work on the specifics for returning home and hosting their first or next statewide meeting.

NOYS Forms Two Pilot State Coalitions

Seeking to promote collaboration and a united response to youth safety and health on a state level, the National Organizations for Youth Safety (NOYS) gathered youth and adults from Missouri and Pennsylvania, in Washington, DC, for the Hamilton Fish Institute's National Conference on Safe Schools and a special NOYS training. The training aided participants in working with other representatives from their state in order to form a group of leaders that can cooperate and participate with each other on state-level initiatives that focus on youth health and safety. In addition, the group worked on crisis planning to offset incidents/tragic events that might occur in the state.

The NOYS training also focused on several NOYS initiatives, including the unique health and safety awareness project planning kit, "Speak Out and Make NOYS" that is designed to plan a project that meets the needs of any organization or community and provides a framework for youth to take action to improve the health and safety of their community. Members also trained on YOUTH-Turn, a program that can be used in communities to help turn adversities into action, and National Youth Traffic Safety Month, held each May to promote safe driving habits during the busy prom and graduation season.

Following the training, NOYS training participants reported that they "want NOYS to be a more active force in their states," and that they will seek to "increase collaboration with other student-led groups to share resources and programs." ■

Students Reflect on Their Conference Experience, *Continued from page 3*

the Library of Congress, the Supreme Court, the Ford Theater, the World War II Memorial, Lincoln Memorial, Vietnam Memorial, Washington Monument, and the White House.

“Our trip to Washington D.C. was exciting and life-changing. My favorite part was the Library of Congress, the National Archives, and the World War II Memorial” said Lauren Ray.

“The trip to Washington D.C. was an eye-opening and gratifying experience. Not only did we get to inform people about abuse and ways to help end it through T.E.A.N., but we also got to learn about the intriguing history of our nation’s capitol. I found the variety of people there to be interesting too,” observed Bibi Robbins.

“Our trip was tons of fun and a great learning experience! It was also a good way for us to spread what we are doing at our school to our senators and congressman. We saw many amazing things and met many amazing people!” Kristina Smith said.

THE TEAN PROJECT IS PART OF A LARGER “STOP THE VIOLENCE” (STOP) STUDENT-CREATED, STUDENT-LED VIOLENCE PREVENTION EFFORT SPONSORED BY THE FAMILY, CAREER AND COMMUNITY LEADERS OF AMERICA (FCCLA). MEMBERS FROM ACROSS THE NATION HAVE COMPLETED TRAININGS AND DEVELOPED SIMILAR PROJECTS IN THEIR SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES TO HELP ENSURE THAT THEY ARE CREATING SAFE AND HEALTHY ENVIRONMENTS.



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AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Towards Safe and Secure Schools, *Continued from page 2*

tems. Also, we provided \$36 million in grants for the creation or expansion of elementary and secondary counseling programs and grants totaling over \$8.5 million to address youth violence and related issues in schools identified as persistently dangerous in school year 2006-2007. Thanks to all of these grants, our students are receiving the opportunity that they deserve to thrive in a culture that is safe and nurturing.”



Joseph Persichini, Jr.
(Assistant Director in Charge, Federal Bureau of Investigation's Washington Field Office)

“The Federal Bureau of Investigation’s (FBI) Community Outreach Program (COP) is designed to foster relationships and understanding between the FBI and the community and to encourage individuals, particularly young people, to consider careers in law enforcement. As a matter of fact, the two high school students from the District of Columbia present here with me today are such individuals. Thanks to COP, they both have top secret clearance

and specialized FBI agent training and, as they will tell you later, plan to pursue careers in law enforcement.

In connection with crime, drug, gang, and violence prevention activities, the FBI is a partner with several national and local organizations such as the Boys and Girls Clubs of America, the National Family Partnership. More recently, we formed a new partnership with the National Guard Bureau and the U.S. Marine Corps for a nationwide science education program for high-risk youth. In addition to this, our COP efforts have expanded to support the spontaneous growth of community outreach programs developed by other FBI employees. These include school-based programs such as Adopt-A-School and Junior Special Agent.

Because we consider prevention to be an integral part of the law enforcement function, we make an important contribution to communities across the country. And, as we continue to reassess and update our Community Outreach Program, the needs of the American people will continue to affect our future projects and assignments.” ■

Lassiter Recognized for Exemplary Service

At a luncheon, on October 30, 2007, William Lassiter, manager of the North Carolina Department of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention-Center for the Prevention of School Violence, was recognized for “exemplary service to children, youth, and communities.”



On hand to present the award was Mrs. Hamilton Fish, wife of the late Hamilton Fish, the New York Congressman for whom the Institute is named. The Recognition of Service Award is granted annually by the Institute for outstanding work in the field of youth violence prevention. Nominations are received from the field and reviewed by a panel of reviewers. Mrs. Fish gave the awardee and his wife an insiders’ tour of Capitol Hill after the ceremony.

Annual Conference Workshop Round-Up

This year's conference featured a range of sessions, from workshops to panel discussions, on school-based mental health, bullying, youth gangs, mentoring, youth courts, school climate, truancy, campus initiatives, barricaded hostage and crisis situations, hate crimes, and zero tolerance policies, to name a few of the 47 sessions included. The following are selected summaries, which we hope will give you a flavor of the discussions that took place and inspire you to want to participate in our 2008 conference!

PERCEPTIONS OF SAFETY IN URBAN SCHOOLS: WHAT STUDENTS THINK ABOUT SCHOOL CLIMATE

During this special session, which was sponsored by the Hamilton Fish Institute (HFI), Dr. Brian K. Perkins provided a look at some of the narrative findings of the "Where We Learn Study." This study, published in 2006 by the National School Boards Association, discusses the perceptions of 32,000 students about issues such as safety and bullying as well as other areas that impact the school environment. Overall, the study found that problems with safety can disrupt the learning environment and influence the potential for achievement.

Nearly 63 percent of the students surveyed said they feel safe in their school, while almost one fourth, 24 percent, feel uncertain about their safety. Interestingly, more than three fourths, 77.2 percent, said they were not bullied during the school day, but over half, 50.2 percent, said they saw others being bullied at least once a month. These findings are very important because research indicates that students who are bullied may experience little social success and their academic performance may suffer.

Dr. Perkins and HFI are working together to perform a pilot study of the "Where

We Learn" methodology by conducting focus groups with students in two school districts in San Francisco.

YOUTH COURT THE GRASS-ROOTS LOCAL PEER JUSTICE PROGRAM



Presenter Scott Bernard Peterson, Federal Program Manager, U.S. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, conducted a lively interactive workshop about youth courts, also called teen, peer, and student courts. These courts are rapidly being implemented in communities and schools throughout the nation. In these juvenile justice programs, youth administer "court" proceedings to their peers who have allegedly committed minor delinquent or criminal infractions.

During the course of the workshop, Mr. Peterson provided information on youth courts from a local, state and national perspective as well as tips for establishing or enhancing a local youth court. He pointed out that youth court has now emerged as the most replicated juvenile justice diversion program in America. There are now over 1,255 local youth court programs in 49 states and the District of Columbia.

The Hamilton Fish Institute has just completed a national study of Youth Courts on behalf of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. The study was released at the 2007 National Youth Court Conference in New Orleans in

December 2007. The completed study will be available on the Hamilton Fish Institute website at the end of December.

PANEL UNDERSCORES NEED FOR MENTAL HEALTH IN ACHIEVING SAFE SCHOOLS

By Krista Kutash, Ph.D., Professor and Deputy Director, Research and Training Center for Children's Mental Health, Florida Mental Health Institute, University of South Florida.

Mental health is essential to safe schools was the message promoted by a diverse panel of experts at the recent national conference of the Hamilton Fish Institute on School and Community Violence. Nationally state policymakers and school boards demand more and better mental health services for all students.

There are numerous attempts by schools across the country to increase the range and types of mental health services available and to achieve a vision of an integrated model of mental health services. After brief introductory comments on how to achieve this vision from each member of the panel, moderator Dr. Joseph Spinazzola, Executive Director of the Trauma Center at the Justice Resource Institute, directed questions to the panelists to be addressed by each in less than three minutes.

Mental health goes beyond looking for an illness or deficits in youth, commented Dr. Howard Adelman, Co-Director of the Center for Mental Health in Schools (CMHS) at UCLA. Adding to this thought, Dr. Linda Taylor, also Co-Director of the CMHS, stated that for too long mental health has been viewed from a medical perspective and the mission of schools calls for ensuring that all students have an equal opportunity to succeed at school and beyond.

Therefore, advocacy for mental health

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Annual Conference Workshop Round-Up, Panel Underscores Need for Mental Health... *Continued from page 5*

in schools must address the needs and interests of all students. Given that these needs and interests depend largely on the way school staff function, advocacy for mental health in schools must encompass a focus on staff roles as well as adequate resources and consistent efforts to overcome stigma and other barriers faced by students. Schools need to integrate mental health promotion in all areas of schooling, not just in specialty services for a few students.

Several challenges face school staff as they begin to integrate mental health promotion into the school culture. Ms. Fannie LeFlore, a licensed psychotherapist, writer and editor, and Co-Director of the Mental Health Matters for Violence Prevention Project (MHMVPP) based in Milwaukee, pointed out the historic difficulties in collaborations between community organizations and schools.

The role of community agencies has been in serving children "at risk," and families identified as "in need" from a simplistic perspective. As a result, they have struggled to bridge the gap that would make it possible to address the continuum of mental health issues related to psychosocial factors, rather than strictly focus on mental illness based on a medical perspective. This inflexibility has created difficulties in changing their cultures to work with a wider population in schools, classrooms and communities, LeFlore said.

Working effectively with parents and non-traditional families has also been a challenge for schools. Dr. Michael Bell, award winning psychiatrist and Co-Director of MHMVPP, noted that school and mental health professionals need to work differently and more effectively at helping parents understand the role of medications in treating mental disorders. Often parents see a prescription for medications as a sign that professionals have given in to quick fixes or given up on their children.

Mental health professionals, school staff, and parents have to view medication as one of many tools, not the only one, which can help their students succeed. Other treatments and close monitoring have to continue when students are placed on medications. In fact, more "wrap-around" services, not less, should

be delivered once medications are prescribed for a student.

The stigma and shame of having a child with a mental health challenge is another dilemma facing families as they seek care for their children, notes Dr. Krista Kutash, Deputy Director of the Research and Training Center Children's Mental Health. Family members are understandably resistant to having their child labeled as having a mental health disorder.

One way to overcome this view is for mental health and school staff to practice strength-based approaches. When family members report hearing only negative attributes about their children, after years of these experiences they are often "burned out" with the professionals who are charged with helping their children. One important change that will help us achieve this vision of a fully-integrated mental health and school system is for professionals to move to strength-based and family-driven care models that acknowledge that family members are the primary decision-makers in the care of their own children, stated Kutash.

Overall, the panelists agreed with the summary by Adelman and Taylor that concern about violence in schools provides opportunities for enhancing connections with families and other neighborhood resources.

However, in too many cases, those responsible for school safety act as if violence on the campus has little to do with home and community. The problem goes well beyond the widely-reported incidents that capture media attention. For children and youth, the most common forms of violence are physical, sexual, and psychosocial abuse experienced at school, at home, and in the neighborhood.

Clearly, the problem is widespread and linked with other problems that are significant barriers to development, learning, parenting, teaching, and socialization. As a consequence, single-factor solutions will not work. This is why guides to safe school planning, to be published later this year by the Hamilton Fish Institute, emphasize such elements as school-wide prevention, intervention, and emergency response strategies, positive school climate, partnerships with law enforcement,

mental health and social services, and family and community involvement.

In effect, the need is for a full continuum of interventions ranging from primary prevention, through interventions as early after onset as is feasible, to treatment of individuals with severe, pervasive, and chronic problems. School and community policymakers must quickly move to embrace comprehensive, multifaceted school-wide and community-wide approaches. And, they must do so in a way that fully integrates adequate resources to implement such approaches for school improvement efforts at every school site.

To read more about school-based mental health, see the Hamilton Fish Institute web site [www.hamfish.org] for "The Role of Mental Health Services in Promoting Safe and Secure Schools" and "Fostering School, Family, and Community Involvement" in the *Effective Strategies for Creating Safer Schools and Communities* series. ■

Coming Up in 2008!

MAY 1, 2008

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July 9, 10, 11, 14, & 15, 2008

Summer 2008 Federal Policy Institute on Educating the Whole Child: NCLB and Accountability for Promoting Emotionally Healthy School Environments at The George Washington University, School of Media and Public Affairs Building, Rm. 310, 805 21st Street, Washington, DC. Sponsored by the GSEHD Department of Teacher Preparation & Special Education and the Department of Counseling, Human and Organizational Studies, in collaboration with the Institute for Educational Leadership and the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP). Visit www.hamfish.org for more information.

Reoccurring Themes from Our Featured Content Tracks

Bullying, mentoring, and community programs were featured tracks in our 2007 conference, so we decided to leave you with a few thoughts on these subjects from the various sessions. However, if you want more in-depth information, visit our website, www.hamfish.org and click on "Proceedings of Persistently Safe Schools" or contact us at 202-496-2200 and request a CD of the proceedings.

BULLYING

- Bullying refers to the physical and/or psychological abuse perpetuated by one powerful child upon another with the intention to harm or dominate.
- Bullying behaviors have increased in frequency and in severity in the past few decades.
- Bullying behaviors begin in elementary school, peak during middle school, and begin to subside in high school.
- Bullying has detrimental health and learning outcomes for victims, bullies, and bystanders.
- Victims experience traumatic symptoms of loneliness, humiliation, insecurity, difficulty with relationships, and/or decreased self-assurance.
- Bystanders suffer from distress and feelings of helplessness as a result of observing the victimization of others.
- Bullies experience problems because they fail to learn normal social boundaries and are at high risk for vandalism, shoplifting, fighting, substance abuse, and school dropout.
- Bullying can be reduced through clear and consistent rules, improved student mentoring, positive incentive programs, and socialized recess or lunch.

- Features of cyberbullying are: it evolves rapidly and children are ignorant about the psychological impact of their online behaviors and the dangers to which they expose themselves and their families.
- Cyberbullying seems to evoke bullying behavior among some adolescents who otherwise might not bully.

MENTORING

- Mentoring programs flourish in a variety of settings, including schools, community centers, and faith institutions and in conjunction with support services such as tutoring, counseling, and job training.
- Mentoring will be more widely-accepted as a prevention strategy if its practitioners operate from a shared understanding of the research into effective strategies and best practices.
- Mentoring is fairly under-researched; however, the research available is painting an increasingly clear picture of what quality looks like and what mentoring programs can reasonably be expected to achieve.
- The most widely used evidence in support of mentoring is from the eight year study of Big Brothers/Big Sister done by Public/Private Ventures (P/PV). Based on their research, participants: 1) were 46 percent less likely to initiate drug use; 2) were 26 percent less likely to initiate alcohol use; 3) were 33 percent less likely to hit someone; 4) skipped half as many days of school; 5) showed modest gains in GPA and, 6) reported improved parent and peer relationships.

COMMUNITY PROGRAMS

The Community Justice Board Program in Tucson, Arizona:

- Takes a proactive stance against crime and includes volunteers from the community.
- Holds juvenile offenders accountable to the victims, provides them the opportunity to give back to their community and to become a productive member of society.
- Provides victims a voice in the restorative process.
- Enables the community to learn more about youth, their families, and the circumstances surrounding the offense.
- Reduces the juvenile court system's case load.

The **Silent Victims of Domestic Violence** is a comprehensive program that raises the awareness of educators about the multiple forms of violence that can impact children and their families. Since its inception in 2003, 15,000 faculty and staff of the Dallas Independent School District have been trained and the city has witnessed a drop in the number of domestic violence and child abuse offenses. ■

Annual Conference Participant Feedback

Participants reported that they mostly appreciated the quality of the speakers, the range of workshop topics, the resource information, the presentations on actual programs and practices, and the networking opportunities.

