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Youth troubles discussed

Officials and teens weigh in on urban violence.

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(April 13, 2006) — The name of the program at Monroe Community College on Wednesday was "Kids Killing Kids: Why Here, Why Now?"

The panel was composed of Rochester's new police chief, a city cop who works at East High School, an assistant district attorney, a federal prosecutor, the mother of a homicide victim and the director of a city-run program called Pathways to Peace.

They all offered ideas. They all had a lot to say.

But the name of the program was "Kids Killing Kids." So what did the kids in attendance think?

"It's not easy nowadays," said James Allen, 15, who lives on the city's east side. "There's killings left and right. There's negativity all over. There's drugs, fighting and stealing."

James' thoughts on what adults need to do to help?

"They've got to be more specific. They've got to find out what kids like," such as recreation centers, he said.

Juan Rivera, 15, of Wilkins Street had the same opinion.

"It's crazy," he said of the streets. "I stay in my house."

And what did he think needed to be done to curb the violence?

"Get 'em off the streets," he said of the bad elements he sees.

There were no easy solutions, but a feeling of desperation that necessitates action. Rochester has the highest homicide rate per capita in the state, with much of the violence involving youths.

David Moore, the city's new police chief, talked about getting involved early.

"Stopping the violence starts long before there's a 17-year-old with an attitude," he said.

Officer Moses Robinson, the school resource officer at East High, talked about the "gang culture" that he said results in loss of freedom or loss of life.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Melanie Babb discussed the "culture of acceptance" regarding guns, when, for instance, women let their boyfriends stash guns at the girlfriend's house.

There was a lot of talk and hope that it will lead to less violence.

And it can't come soon enough. Because, as James Allen said, it's not easy nowadays.