

Organizations prepare to support youth after DA releases decision in Matt Kenny investigation

April 03, 2015 3:00 pm • By Pat Schneider



Students fill the Capitol rotunda March 9 over the killing of Tony Robinson.

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Madison area community groups are banding together to provide youths with a structure to respond in a productive way to the Dane County district attorney's decision on whether to bring criminal charges against the police officer who killed Tony Robinson last month.

The coalition plans a Youth Empowerment Summit, to be led by youths, that will feature a town hall discussion, according to an announcement released April 1 through the Boys and Girls Club of Dane County. The "informative" summit will "provide a platform for youth to find and use their voice effectively," organizers said.

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Wednesday, April 1, 2015

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COMMUNITY LEADERS COLLABORATE TO HOLD YOUTH EMPOWERMENT SUMMIT IN RESPONSE TO DA'S INVESTIGATIVE REPORT

Madison, WI - A coalition of community leaders are proactively responding ahead of the District Attorney's decision surrounding the often-misused shooting death of Tony Robinson, leader from the African American Council of Teachers, Boys & Girls Club of Dane County, NAACP, Union League of Greater Madison, 100 Black Men of Madison, United Way of Dane County, Madison Metropolitan School District, and many other faith and civic groups are partnering to host a region-wide Youth Empowerment Summit which will be chaired by Perry Brown M. from the Madison School District.

Greg Jovan, President of the Dane County NAACP will chair the overall coordination for the project by engaging a team of African American colleagues in the effort across designed to move Madison forward. "The combined efforts of local organizations, leaders and community will provide a unified response to meet the needs of our youth and community," said Jovan.

The effort will consist of an interactive summit for young people, meals with enrichment opportunities and entertainment. Organizers of the effort, organizers are also planning a special community concert with the Young, Gifted and Black Coalition. The group will also create a community resource guide, highlighting local and regional services for our neighborhood youth. The event is being held at the University of Wisconsin-Madison's Regis Center.

Helping to champion the initiative is Michael Johnson, CEO of the Boys & Girls Club of Dane County. "The youth's voices are essential to a great of educational progress that occurred our region's youth at the center of the conversation. After meeting with local leaders and listening to their community members, their feedback and concerns, understanding, we need for a youth focused initiative to speed the road of remarkable progress," said Johnson.

Over the next several months, community leaders organized through the Youth Empowerment Summit will be working to the area and prepared to engage a series of colleagues in a thoughtful process designed to create a vision for our city. This has great opportunity with the upcoming Youth Summit and community launch to engage correctly and to take a giant step forward in

No date has yet been set for the summit. Dane County District Attorney Ismael Ozanne on March 27 received an investigative report on the shooting of Robinson, an unarmed black 19-year-old, by Madison police officer Matt Kenny, who is white. Ozanne has not indicated when he will announce his decision or whether he will require more evidence collection by the state Department of Justice's Division of Criminal Investigation, which conducted the initial investigation.

Area youth demonstrated their interest in the case March 9, when they filled the state Capitol to demand justice during a week of peaceful demonstrations around the city following the shooting of Robinson on March 6.

Civil unrest has erupted in other cities when authorities declined to prosecute white police officers who killed black men. And concern over keeping demonstrations in Madison peaceful has been raised, in part, by controversial remarks from a leader of the Young, Gifted and Black Coalition, which has been at the forefront of the community response to Robinson's killing.

Brandi Grayson told Madison City Council members on March 17 that when the full story of the shooting becomes public, "... this city will effing erupt. And the blood and whatever takes place after that will be on your hands and the mayor's hands."

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Coalition members, who have been confrontational since the group's founding last summer in the aftermath of the death of Michael Brown at the hands of a police officer in suburban St. Louis, remain resolutely provocative as the stakes in Madison have risen with Robinson's death. The underlying issues of racial inequity must at long last be rectified, members say.

Planners of a coordinated youth response to the Tony Robinson charging decision include some of the oldest and most respected local groups addressing race issues, including the African American Council of Churches, NAACP, Urban League of Greater Madison, and 100 Black Men of Madison, as well as the Boys and Girls Club. Organizers say they will coordinate activities with those of the Young, Gifted and Black Coalition.

A way to direct youth response to the Robinson decision was a top concern of community leaders, said Michael Johnson, CEO of the Boys & Girls Club.

"Honestly, I couldn't be more thrilled to be a part of a focused project that includes our region's youth at the center of the conversation. After meeting with local leaders and listening to many community members, their feedback and concerns, overwhelmingly, the need for a youth-focused initiative topped the list of immediate priorities," said Johnson.

Planning for the event, which will include enrichment opportunities and entertainment, will be chaired by Greg Jones, president of the Dane County NAACP. Organizers are also planning a community brunch facilitated by Gloria Ladson-Billings and Milele Chikasa Anana.

"The combined efforts of local organizations, leaders and community will provide a unified pathway to meet the needs of our youth and community," said Jones.

Other partners to the effort are the United Way of Dane County, Madison Metropolitan School District, and other faith and civic groups. The project is being funded by the United Way and UW-Madison Law School with pass through funds coming from Laurie Carlson Progressive Ideas Forum.

The Youth Empowerment Summit will be chaired by Percy Brown Jr. from the Middleton School District, where officials have been working to provide an environment to support students who want to discuss the issues raised by Robinson's death.

Discussions to date have sometimes been difficult, superintendent Don Johnson wrote in a message to parents. The DA's decision and release of the investigative report "will likely renew emotion, passion and energy around this matter. We know that some students will need additional opportunities to process and discuss when information around the investigation becomes public in the coming days," Johnson said.

In the Madison School District, where an estimated 1,500 students left school to protest on March 9, officials have been working with individual schools to plan for the return of students from spring break on April 7 with strategies on safety, communication and opportunities for discussion and expression, said spokesperson Rachel Strauch-Nelson.

Educators realize "students will need additional opportunities to process and discuss, particularly

when the investigation is completed and released," said Strauch-Nelson said. "We want our students to be safe, learn how to discuss challenging issues productively and think about how to make positive change in our community."

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Tags Tony Robinson, Boys And Girls Club Of Dane County, Young Gifted And Black Coalition, African American Council Of Churches, Urban League Of Greater Madison, 100 Black Men Of Madison, Naacp Of Dane County
