

CITY

## Youth and Unity Summit seeks to empower in wake of Tony Robinson's death



12 HOURS AGO • [IRENE BURSKI](#)

With the underlying context of Tony Robinson's death six weeks ago, more than 1,300 Madison area students filled the James Madison Memorial High School gym Sunday for a series of speakers focusing on the positive messages of youth empowerment, intermixed with student performances, workshops and live music.

The Dane County Youth and Unity Summit, an event sponsored by the Boys and Girls Club of Dane County and American Family Insurance, among other organizations, echoed other youth engagement oriented events.

"The model is pretty much the same, however the climate of what's been happening here in Madison created a greater sense of urgency, which ultimately pushed up the timing," Project Manager John Suggs said.

Facilitated by organizers Suggs and Boys and Girls Club of Dane County CEO Michael Johnson, as well as other individuals, the event integrated heavy youth participation in both planning and execution.

"We did four months of work in two and a half weeks to pull this off," Suggs said. "We had about 25 young people who met twice, sometimes three times a week ... what they really wanted to do was to take responsibility for the content of today's program. They didn't want a lot of adults interfering in the dialogue [and wanted] to really capture the importance of unity."

In a panel featuring exclusively students, speakers defined both respect and unity as concepts and addressed the issues which hold students back in the classroom, including existing ignorance toward what the problems are.

"People are very ignorant and uneducated regarding what's going on," one student said. "I feel like everything we do is based on adults ... we follow what our parents do."

Members of Tony Robinson's family took the stage to speak on the summit's theme, stressing the importance of education and remembering what happened in Madison as critical for ensuring a better future. Andrea Irwin, Robinson's mother,

expressed her hope to someday have a safer community, citing the “youth-inspired” marches and events.

“I look around and I’m so inspired by all of you ... Please believe me, the world is watching all of you right now, and they’re going to continue to watch,” Robinson’s aunt, Lorin Carter, said, echoing Irwin. “I made my nephew a promise that I would never let anybody forget his name. So for anybody who’s tired about hearing about it ... You’re going to know every single hashtag ... every single person who has been killed in this manner.”