

Growing Up Boulder: Teens invited to share opinions on city

New initiative focused on making city better place for youth

By Amy Bounds, Camera Staff Writer

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If you go

What: Growing Up Boulder annual youth event

When: 6-9 p.m. Saturday

Where: Mapleton YMCA, 2850 Mapleton Ave., Boulder

More info: 303-735-5199,
growingupboulder@gmail.com

Jonah Kim, a sophomore at Boulder's Fairview High School, wants to encourage more local businesses to take a youth-friendly approach by welcoming teens into their stores and hiring them as employees.

The 15-year-old is part of a group that's surveying businesses on their willingness to hire teens, with a goal of creating a database for high school students. The group also is working on an award that would be given to businesses that prove themselves to be teen-friendly.

"I've seen other kids struggling to get jobs,"

Jonah said. "I've experienced hostility from businesses. This just seemed like a really neat way to get involved in my community."

He's one of the 30 or so teens who are active in Growing Up Boulder, an initiative focused on making the city a better place for children and youth. The group is hosting its second-annual youth event on Saturday.

The event includes presentations by young people on their projects, along with dancing, skateboarding and a performance by local teen band Watch for Wildlife. Participants also can use a 3-D model to create their vision for the redevelopment of the Diagonal Plaza.

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For high school students who attend, there's the added incentive of a free ticket to The Loft, a newly opened teen café and dance club at Twenty Ninth Street.

"It's a unique opportunity for kids to have their voices heard and their opinions heard," Jonah said.

Growing Up Boulder was formed in 2009 as a partnership between the city of Boulder, the University of Colorado, the Boulder Valley School District and several other organizations as a way for city officials, educators and community members to address youth

concerns, organizers said.

"It's a great opportunity to hear from people in the community that we don't often hear from on issues that affect their lives," said David Driskell, Boulder's executive director of community planning and sustainability.

The initiative includes action groups to promote community art, conduct business surveys and gather input on teen nightlife in Boulder. The group also is applying for grant money for a project that would target Latino youth, who participate disproportionately in risky behaviors based on Boulder Valley survey results.

Driskell said the overall goal is to get young people constructively engaged.

"It allows us to see young people as a real positive asset to the community, not a problem that has to be dealt with," he said. "They have great ideas and great energy."

Aleah Matthews Runner, an eighth-grader at Boulder's Summit Middle School, said she got involved while looking for volunteer opportunities.

She said she's looking forward to sharing her ideas on redeveloping the Diagonal Plaza, including more open space and possibly an indoor mall. But overall, she said, Boulder is "a really great place."

"It's super safe and fun," she said.