

# Unity is key to fighting drugs, group told

White House drug prevention official leads conference.

By Julia Zappei  
Of The Morning Call

Community coalitions are instrumental in preventing and fighting drug use, White House deputy drug czar Mary Ann Solberg told a gathering of 350 people Tuesday at a community-building conference in Fogelsville.

Solberg emphasized the importance of banding together on all levels and across all sectors — in schools, workplaces, homes and religious communities — to curb drug use and crime.

"We are faced in this country with a monumental health crisis," she said. "The community is responsible for drug use. All drug problems are local. All solutions are local."

She was speaking at justCommunity Inc.'s fourth annual conference, "Unleashing the Power of Youth and Community Potential," at the Holiday



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**MARY ANN SOLBERG** talks with children attending a conference in Fogelsville, where she rallied them to fight drug abuse and crime.

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Solberg, deputy director of the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy, said it was important to give youngsters' consistent messages about the dangers of marijuana and other drugs.

Adults play a vital part as

role models, she said.

But, she added, young people have to realize the positive impact they can make in their communities.

"You cannot change youth behavior unless you first address adult behavior," she said. "Young people, you have power."

In addition to Solberg's speech, which tied in with the theme of community building and youth empowerment, the three-day conference offered 30 workshops and various presentations to participants from 21 states. Tuesday was the last day of the conference.

In workshops and small groups, adults and children discussed how to curb smoking and took part in exercises designed to teach life skills.

Lee Rush, executive director of justCommunity, said the conference was structured to simulate communities, in which adults interact with children, working together to find solutions.

"[The workshops] were fun. I liked the interactivity," said Courtney Floyd, 15, an Allen High School student and member of Teen TAPS, a community youth group that co-sponsored the event.

A Michigan native, Solberg has served on various community education and substance-abuse prevention boards and commissions.

julia.zappei@mcall.com  
610-820-6108