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Music seminar brings students together

By Elizabeth M. Mack
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Matt Stache and the JackKnife Barbers started into a fast rock music riff. After about 16 bars, the band stopped.

Kasi Hubbard then asked the students of the 12th annual Youth Leadership Forum what the music said to them, what emotion the music expressed. The answers varied, from "lazy" to "angry" to "confused."

And that was the point, Hubbard said. The same music, she explained, can be interpreted different ways by different people.

The four-day forum, hosted by the Able Trust, is designed to teach students with disabilities about career building and leadership. It wrapped up Saturday with an "Empowerment of Music" seminar at the Southgate Campus Center on Florida State University's campus.

During Saturday's seminar, Kasi Hubbard, a master's student at FSU's College of Social Work, lead an open-floor discussion on what is music and how it can be interpreted. Matt Stache and the JackKnife

Barbers offered the musical interludes that helped the discussion.

"This whole week was about empowerment and advocacy. This is one more tool for them to do that," Hubbard said. "I think the kids enjoyed it. People like to talk about music. And the band made the whole thing amazing."

Megan Atkinson, 17, said Saturday's seminar was her favorite part of the forum, but she enjoyed her entire four-day experience.

"I loved it," she said. "This was my first year participating and I really want to come back next year. I've enjoyed meeting new people and making new friends. I'm really not ready for it to end."

Atkinson said the forum taught her that she will be able to get a job despite her disability, but now she will also know what to do in college and how life will change for her when she gets older.

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The forum offered the students a variety of activities such as a visit to the Capitol, a career fair, a mentor's luncheon, a meet-and-greet with FSU athletes and an activity day at Optimist Park.

"I learned a lot from the forum," said attendee Katelyn Cross, 16. "My favorite part was visiting the Capitol and listening to different representatives. But I learned leadership skills and developed career goals. And now I know that I can live on my own after I graduate high school."

This year there were 50 first-timers and 23 returning students to the forum, said Ray Ford, Able Trust assistant director of communications and events.

"What we are looking to do is hopefully empower these students to be a positive voice in their community when they return home and not only advocate for themselves, but for others that share their situation," Ford said.

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