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Local girl on panel to discuss future of peers

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At only 14, Anjelika Blackman has no problem talking about the tough stuff: global warming, social responsibility, the presidential election.

In fact, she can do it in front of a roomful of cameras and journalists, as she did earlier this month on a panel composed of smart teens from around the country.

"I was excited to be a part of something," Anjelika said recently in her living room.

At the Newseum in Washington, the rising freshman at Spotsylvania County's Riverbend High School discussed a Horatio Alger Association report titled "The State of Our Nation's Youth."

The report found that most teens are pessimistic about the country's future, but optimistic about their own. Many of the panelists, ranging in age from 14 (Anjelika was the youngest) to 18, said the results showed members of their generation are in charge of their future, despite the lagging economy.

On the panel, Anjelika was candid about the issues, especially regarding the report's finding that youths today care about the presidential election.

"I don't see a lot of kids following the election, because we can't vote," Anjelika said at the event, which can be seen in a video posted on the association's Web site.

She echoed the panelists' remarks about their generation's wanting to make a difference: "We have more opportunities to do what we want and to do what we feel is right to change whatever we want to change."

The panelists were "exquisite," Anjelika said.

"They know how to speak their minds," she added.

Born in Italy to a military family, Anjelika has lived in the U.S. for only three years. So when a reporter asked the students whether race was a factor in making friends, Anjelika said it didn't.

Living in Japan, England and Cuba allowed her to appreciate various cultures, she said last week. But the transition to life in the U.S. wasn't easy.

Going from a tight-knit school for military children living abroad to an American public school was a shock at first, she said. Now, she's friends with everybody.

Anjelika wants to be a doctor and become fluent in Spanish. Her mother, Kimberly Blackman, said her daughter is a leader in youth groups and in church.

"That's one of the reasons she wants to go into the medical field," Blackman said. "She really is a people person."

Former Chancellor Middle School Principal Shirley Eye said she chose Anjelika for the panel especially because of her leadership. She placed first in a middle school debate competition during the previous school year.

"She dares to be the master of her own ship among her peers," Eye said.

Anjelika is so comfortable speaking onstage that she changed her class schedule to take a debate course at Riverbend.

She said she's an optimist who has high hopes for her generation.

"We are the ones who are going to change the future," Anjelika said.

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