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Teen girls learn life-lessons at special expo

by Kathy Chaney
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Loving the skin they're in, staying on a path to success and encouraging others is the message about 200 teen girls recently heard during an eight-hour conference.

Saturday, Embracing Your Future Association Inc. held its fifth annual No More Drama expo at the Illinois Institute of Technology for the teens and their parents, complete with a series of workshops for the girls about self-esteem, career development, domestic violence and a fashion show.

For parents only, a session was held to help them recognize their part in their child's behavior by looking at their own childhood, and how it possibly influences the child's current behavior.

A seventh-grader from Gwendolyn Brooks Middle School, Shaniqua Williams, said she was already pretty much "headstrong" but needed to hear the advice that was given.

"Sometimes I come across as having an attitude, especially in school, but I didn't think that I did. I was just speaking my mind, not realizing that I was going about it the wrong way. This conference opened my eyes and I can go back home and to school with a different attitude." the

Embracing Your Future's founder and CEO Melissa Harris.

Harris, a 31-year-old South Side native, started the organization eight years ago to implement training programs on self-esteem, career development, anger management, healthy parenting and life skills.

The mission: Helping youth and adults recognize and reach their fullest potential, Harris said. "Too often we see many youths not setting goals, not loving themselves, not staying on the right path academically and career-wise. It really starts at home, but sometimes that home is broken and help is needed," Harris said about the importance of the organization.

Several girls who live at the Mercy Home for Girls and Boys attended the conference said they plan to share what they've learned at the group home.

Rita Jackson, 15, said there are many issues among the girls at Mercy, ranging from dating violence to independence, that she feels confident going back armed with the knowledge.

"Whew! I know too many people that needed to be here. Hopefully we can go back and help resolve some issues," said Jackson, a student at St. Frances de Sales High School.

Jackson's friend Deja Henderson, also a resident of Mercy, echoed her sentiments.



Teen girls take in the displays and offerings Saturday at the No More Drama expo held at Illinois Institute of Technology. The annual event was sponsored by the Embracing Your Future Association Inc. and offered a series of workshops for the girls about self-esteem, career development, domestic violence and a fashion show.

Defender/Warson Robinson.