

## Youth Development League motivates youth to excellence

Written by

Thursday, 05 July 2012 21:05

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Some people gain inspiration from their childhood difficulties and overcome their environments, subsequently reaching back to help others with similar backgrounds.

Such is the case of Joyce Lester, the executive director of the Youth Development League (YDL), a non-profit program of the Metro Education and Outreach Services (MEOS) agency, which seeks to cultivate youth by introducing them to their world of possibilities. Metro Education and Outreach Services is located in St. Paul at 245 N. Ruth St., Ste. 107.

Pictured: Instructor Kwame Collins, former YDL participant.

Lester feels though she grew up in the Chicago Housing Authority projects, the projects did not grow up in her.

“I’ve lived a blessed life and enjoy motivating youth to excel,” said Lester.

The YDL provides intensive workshops to increase the youths’ knowledge base and critical thinking skills. Workshops include speech technique, public speaking, speech writing, ethics, financial management, entrepreneurship, healthy relationships and leadership training. In past years, local, state and national government workshops have been offered.

In addition, guest speakers from organizations such as the Minnesota Vikings, local banks, area politicians, journalists, entrepreneurs, business leaders, attorneys and other professionals come

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in and give presentations. Program participants also enjoy weekly field trips such as horseback riding, tennis, golf, bowling, skating, major league sports, and the theater.

Travel is also a component of the program. Past participants have traveled to Canada, Atlanta, Orlando, and Chicago. For many of the youth, the trips are their first encounter with airline travel.

This summer, a former YDL student, Kwame Collins, who participated in the program from age 12 through 15, is one of the instructors for the 2012 session. Collins teaches speech technique, speech presentation and speech writing classes. The sessions are designed to strengthen the students' writing skills and ability to communicate effectively.

When Collins came into the YDL he, his mom and two siblings were living in transitional housing in Saint Paul. According to Collins, the community he had grown up in, in Milwaukee consisted of high crime rates, drugs and violence, leading him to believe his future was limited. He credits the program with drastically changing his outlook on life. Collins is now a senior at Augsburg College, majoring in psychology.

The YDL is a Christian program with a strong emphasis on spirituality. Lester, a minister, attributes her acceptance of Christ as a teenager as critical to her ability to avoid being consumed by the negative environment in which she grew up.

Additional information on the YDL can be obtained at 651-739-1639, or [meos@usfamily.net](mailto:meos@usfamily.net).