

Kya Brown: Aiming for the top

Written by Abeni Hill, Editorial Intern
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Kya Brown, 14, attends DeLaSalle High School in Minneapolis and serves as a 9th grade student representative on her high school's student council.

She is on the cheer squad and the basketball team and plans to join the track team in the spring. Her favorite subjects are English and social studies. The highly-involved teenager was also first runner up in the Miss Black Minnesota USA Pageant.

The yearly pageant is one of the events held by the Miss Black Minnesota USA Program, a non-profit organization that strives to empower young African and African-American women through scholarship and youth development programming. The Miss Black Minnesota USA Program implemented a youth engagement curriculum in the Robbinsdale Area Schools for girls between the ages of eight and 17.

Brown's platform in the pageant was youth leadership.

"When we grow up, one of us in our generation is going to be the president," said Brown. "So we need to start acting like leaders now." The high school student also strives to combat stereotypes about youth.

Brown said she gets involved with various organizations and programs to show the versatility of youth. "It could maybe show other people that yes, we can do things," said Brown.

Brown's mother, Linda Waters, said her daughter is disputing the stereotype that youth are lazy. Brown's goal is to demonstrate that youth are capable of being responsible and planning for the future.

Waters said her daughter's engagement in the pageant as well as other extra-curricular activities is about self-empowerment and empowering others.

"It was important for her to step outside of her comfort zone and show that here she is a black, beautiful, intelligent young lady," said Waters. "She can really encourage her peers and her circle of friends."

Brown said getting involved in different activities like the pageant can lead to many

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opportunities.

“This is building my college resume and it’s helpful to try new things,” said Brown.

The ambitious teenager encourages people her age to explore different activities and opportunities that will strengthen leadership skills.

“You can meet new friends, have new experiences and you’re just going to accomplish a lot,” said Brown.

One thing that is not a new experience for Brown is the piano.

“I started playing the piano when I was in 4th grade at Whittier (International Elementary),” said Brown. Whittier has a music partnership with MacPhail Center for Music. Brown was attracted to the sound of the piano and the instrument’s range.

“I like the piano because I think it is really fun and the sound is really pretty,” said Brown. “There are lots of different melodies you can play.”

For Brown, playing the piano has many benefits when planning for the future. “I think it is really important to know how to play an instrument,” said Brown. “You might need it for things like pageants.”

Brown played “Lift Every Voice and Sing” for the talent portion in the pageant. She said it was the most challenging piece she has played.

“It was a struggle because I had to learn it in four weeks,” said Brown. “There was so little time and I had to practice it so frequently and I couldn’t make any mistakes.”

“Playing piano in the pageant was pretty gusty,” said Diana Bearmon, Brown’s piano teacher. “She just worked an incredible amount.”

The piano teacher said participating in the pageant was an important step for Brown.

“For her goals, I think that was a good thing for her,” said Bearmon. “She learned to stick to things and work through a process.”

Brown said she chose “Lift and Every Voice and Sing” because of the song’s connection with African-Americans. “It seemed perfect for the pageant because it (is) the National Anthem for African-Americans,” said Brown.

The first runner up said her participation in the pageant was worthwhile.

“At first I was really disappointed I didn’t win,” said Brown. “But, I was really happy that I went through the experience of being in my first pageant and that I got so far.”

Brown said she wants to continue her participation in pageants and her support of youth

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