



by Melissa Ezell

EXPOSURE

at its best

MEMPHIS YOUTH LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

This summer, the Memphis Regional Chamber (MRC) embarked upon a new program initiative designed to equip the city's youth with skills necessary to successfully enter the workforce. The MRC partnered with Memphis Challenge, Inc., a talent identification program for high-achieving students of color, the mission of which is to inspire and develop future Memphis leaders. Through this partnership, the Memphis Youth Leadership Program (MYLP) was born. This eight-week intensive program was designed to plant seeds of transformation in the minds of 54 eager 14- to 17-year-olds who had applied for summer employment through the City of Memphis Summer Youth Employment Program. This pilot project was aimed at providing students with interactive life skills through learning and applied experience in workforce readiness.

MYLP was made possible through the vision of six sponsoring companies: The Cummins Foundation, Memphis Light, Gas & Water (MLG&W), Smith & Nephew, Accredo Health, The Kemmons Wilson Family Foundation, and the Women's Foundation for a Greater Memphis. The students were divided into three groups and spent the summer covering eight learning modules. These learning modules are Career Exploration, Problem-Solving and Conflict Resolution, Time and Money Management, Business Etiquette, Self-Esteem and Personal Image, Effective Communication and Public Speaking, Community Service, and Personal Responsibility and Character Development.

In addition to studying these learning modules, the students were exposed to a myriad of events that fostered active minds through memorable experiences and activities that allowed the students to enhance their capacity to make informed decisions. One of the events held was a Career Day in which the students were matched with career professionals who shared their dreams and their aspirations to follow their career path. Twenty-three panelists with careers ranging from industrial design, law, aeronautics, audio engineering, and logistics



participated in the forum. The students gained valuable advice and many of the students shared their personal contact information with the professionals in an effort to provide the panelists with a statement of progress and development.

The Community Service module of the training course incorporated two projects, "Green Living" and "Imagine Memphis." "Green Living" involved the students spending five weeks at the Midtown Gardens GROW MEMPHIS project where they learned about composting, planting, and building a green house. The project's highlight was a trip to the Harris Farms in Millington, TN, where the students enjoyed seeing their agricultural lessons at work. This trip was complete with a tour of the blueberry orchard where the students picked and ate fresh blueberries.

The pinnacle of the Memphis Youth Leadership Program was the closing awards ceremony held in honor of the participating students and their parents, dignitaries, and sponsors of the program. The students had the opportunity to showcase their talents, which included a mock launch of their footwear and apparel line and an original hip-hop song performance. According to Memphis Challenge Executive Director Cassandra H. Webster, "We truly achieved our goal of connecting the dots of life education, career and aspirations." For more information on the Memphis Youth Leadership Program, please contact Cassandra Webster at 901.312.9620 or websmc@aol.com.

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