

Merlene Davis: Workshop seeks girls who want to have goals and have fun

Published: March 11, 2013

By Merlene Davis — Herald-Leader columnist

When I first met Tanya Torp in August 2010, she was struggling in a weak economy to pull off her wedding reception.

The wedding was traditional, but the reception was anything but.

She invited anyone and everyone in the northside community surrounding Duncan Park to share in her joy by stopping by the reception-turned-block party. At the end of the festivities, she planned to give out canned food, clothing and personal hygiene products to anyone needing them. She wanted to give gifts, not receive them.

Torp's husband said they were living their faith according to Luke 14: 13-14, which reads, "But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

That same faith has Torp trying to get through to young girls who dress to attract the eyes of boys and older men, and who behave as if their self-worth is connected to their sex appeal.

As she and her husband were walking through their community a few years ago, she spoke with some girls who were scantily clad and asked about their dreams.

"They didn't have a lot of self-esteem," she said.

That was the beginning of Be Bold, a workshop for girls ages 9 to 18, now in its second year. Torp said the workshop partners with other youth organizations, serving only as support for them.

"We can also help raise money for them," Torp said. "We want to make them successful with what they do."

A directory of groups that can be helpful to girls will be distributed at the daylong workshop to be held March 23 at the University of Kentucky Student Center.

The workshop will feature several speakers, including David Cozart of the Fayette County Fatherhood Initiative, who will discuss how men view women and how strong male role models can strengthen the self-esteem of young women.

Also, several women will talk about how they overcame obstacles to reach their goals in life.

One is Soreyda Benedit Begley, a Lexington-based fashion designer and community activist who worked in sweatshops in Honduras as a girl.

Now a mother of three, Begley is the director of the Lexington Fashion Collaborative, which encourages others to enter the field of clothing design. She will talk about her life and coordinate a fashion show as well.

Erin Howard, Latino Outreach and Services Coordinator for Bluegrass Community and Technical College, has helped Latino high school students and GED graduates make their way through the college world. She will encourage all girls to find something they truly love, follow that dream and make their communities and themselves proud.

Also, Djuan Trent, Miss Kentucky 2010, will talk about her upbringing, her road to a college degree and becoming a winning beauty contestant.

Plus, the participants will discuss ways of combating the mean-girls phenomenon in our schools, with members of the local chapter of Girl Talk. The nationally recognized esteem-building program features high school girls mentoring middle school girls.

The Be Bold workshop will feature candid, age-appropriate talk with health professionals about sex, dating and love. While parents are welcome in the large-group setting for those discussions, they will not be permitted in the smaller breakout sessions.

Advance registration and a signed permission slip are required.

"We don't think the girls can talk openly with their mothers there," Torp said. "We want the girls to see how the media sees their bodies and to let them know your body is not your currency.

"That is not how you should value yourself."

Everything is free, she said, including breakfast, lunch, a T-shirt and a gift bag filled with toiletries.

The girls will not just be sitting and listening, either. There are step-dance lessons, and yoga and zumba lessons.

Mix that with cooking and etiquette classes, drama and ways to hone entrepreneurial skills, and the day will be jam-packed.

About 150 volunteers are scheduled. All they need is your daughter, niece, granddaughter or neighbor.

"We are all about empowering girls," Torp said.

And, from what I've seen, that would not be a bad thing.

If you go

Be Bold workshop

What: A workshop for girls ages 9-18 that looks to empower them and build their self-esteem.

When: 8 a.m.-5 p.m. March 23.

Where: University of Kentucky Student Center, 404 South Limestone.

Cost: Free. Includes breakfast and lunch.

Read more here: <http://www.kentucky.com/2013/03/11/2552505/merlene-davis-seeking-girls-who.html#storylink=cpy>