

THE TIMES LEADER

Princeton, Kentucky



Disciples launch Higher education platform

Friday, July 06, 2007

The Community Disciples' youth group is taking on a new goal: raising the number of black Caldwell County students who complete a college education.

Dubbed "Operation Higher Education," the effort is a part of the YSA Youth Venture Program, a partnership between Youth Service America (YSA) and Youth Venture, Inc.

YSA is a resource center that partners with thousands of organizations committed to increasing the availability of quality service programs for youth. Youth Venture, Inc., is a national non-profit organization that provides teams of young people (ages 12-20) with the tools necessary to start clubs or organizations that will be of lasting benefit to the community.

Paulette Gray, a Community Disciples member who helped organize the venture, said the group is beginning its work by researching the percentage of local black students who graduate from high school but do not go on to college, or those who go but do not stay, and the reasons for those decisions.

The group plans to research the high school's last 10 graduating classes to determine how many students went on to earn college degrees. "We just think the percentage is extremely low," she said.

Group members spent their first meeting June 27 brainstorming ideas about why the lack of interest in college exists.

Some, Gray said, cited a lack of money as the reason. Others said having children makes a higher education impossible, and others said they were simply not college material.

"For every reason they gave, we found a reason to counter it," she said. The youth group will spend its time in the coming months working to change those perceptions and encourage local students to pursue college degrees.

The idea for the program came as Gray, principal at Caldwell County Primary School, sought a way to focus the youth group. "Education is my heart," she said, "and I felt like higher education would be the perfect focus for our group." The catalyst for its launch came from an e-mail sent to Gray from Virginia Oldham about the YSA Youth Venture project.

The group's initial goals are simple: raising \$1,000 for the Disciples' scholarship fund and \$1,000 for the Living Hope Pregnancy and Family Care Center Abstinence Committee in a year.

The abstinence committee is developing a curriculum to present to church, civic and school groups.

The Living Hope center operates out of the Disciples' headquarters, the Mary Jane Jones Community Center at 108 West Green St.

Monthly activities will also complement those fund-raising goals, said Gray. Some planned activities include informational meetings related to higher education and a talent show in October.

Another of the group's service projects involves assisting local preservationist Angela Blair as she works to organize records from all the black schools in the county's history.

"The history will open their eyes," said Gray. "We're hoping it will give them a sense of pride about who they are and what they can become."

All the activities should tie in to the notion that a successful higher education can be a reality for each student and to make them realize their individual potential — "to let them know that they are valuable citizens, that they can make change occur if they would just take the time," Gray said.

The group will meet twice a month for a year. Its next meeting is scheduled for Sunday, July 22. After that meeting, they will meet on the same schedule as the Disciples' adult members, on the first and third Sundays of each month.

The youth group's first fund-raising venture will be a car wash at McDonald's this month.

- The community center also has a variety of surplus donated, working computer equipment to get rid of.