Students learn leadership skills at youth seminar

By LOUISE MITCHELL
Daily News Staff

About 100 students in grades six through 12 in the St. Thomas-St. John District were chosen because of their leadership potential and academic excellence to participate in a two-day training program at the first Youth Empowerment Seminar.

The training sessions led by nationally recognized youth motivational speaker Al Duncan began on Oct. 28 and concluded on Oct. 29 at Marriott's Frenchman's Reef Beach Resort on St. Thomas.

While the students brought their skills as future leaders with them, they also took away lessons to share with their peers.

"I am happy to be a part of this program because we get to go back to school to teach others what we have learned in order to make the school better than it is," said Qubilah Archibald, a student at Addelita Cancryn Junior High School.

Attending the seminar were 35 students from Charlotte Amalie High School; 27 from Ivanna Eudora Kean High School; 15 from Addelita Cancryn Junior High; 15 from Bertha C. Boschulte Middle School; and six from Julius Sprauve School on St. John.

Maurice Hansby, a student from Boschulte Middle School said the program was useful in teaching students how to work together in becoming mature and focused leaders.

"I will teach my peers that it is better to be a leader than a follower," Hansby said. "You should know to follow someone if they're doing good things."

The aspiring leaders learned to cultivate positive ideas, and they worked in groups to discuss ways to solve the growing issues of drugs and violence in the community.

Duncan used a host of motivational skills to make his point to the students. To share the lesson that people have value regardless of life's tough circumstances, he took out a $20 bill and trampled on it.

"How can you become a leader if you do not recognize your value?" he asked.

Duncan told the students that as a child he faced emotionally traumatizing experiences, such as finding out that his father, who was his childhood hero, was addicted to crack cocaine. He said his ability to recover from his father's struggles became an inspiration to him, and he emphasized to the students that "Greatness has no age; failure is only permanent if you quit."

At the end of the seminar, each student received an autographed copy of one of Duncan's motivational books and a certificate attesting to their successful completion of the program.
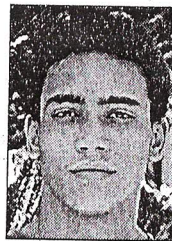
Student News

Ryan Biko Robb-Joseph

Former Good Hope School student Ryan Biko Robb-Joseph earned an AP Scholar Award in recognition of his exceptional achievement on the AP exams. He took the advanced placement exams in May, and received advanced placement in three courses — English, French and Calculus.

The College Board's Advanced Placement Program provides willing and academically prepared students with the opportunity to take rigorous college-level courses while still in high school and to earn college credit, advanced placement or both for successful performance on the AP Exams. About 18 percent of the more that 1.8 million students worldwide who took the AP Exams performed at a sufficiently high level to also earn an AP Scholar Award.

Robb-Joseph, a 2010 graduate of Good Hope School, is a freshman at Wesleyan College in Macon, Georgia.

Ryan Biko
Robb-Joseph

Syracuse University

The following students are among the approximately 3,600 new students who have enrolled at Syracuse University in Syracuse, N.Y., for the 2010-11 academic year. Syracuse's new students are studying from among the more than 200 majors offered at the institution.

Suraj Balani of St. Thomas is enrolled in SU's College of Visual and Performing Arts. Shoy Rey of St. Thomas is enrolled in SU's College of Arts and Sciences. Dylan Katz of St. Croix is enrolled in SU's College of Arts and Sciences. Meihua Fang of St. Croix is enrolled in SU's College of Arts and Sciences.

YOUTH SEMINAR

"I have learned that we have to cooperate, listen, and come together as one if we want a change in our community," said Khaliesha Dias from Ivanna Eudora Kean High School. She also described the seminar as being a life-changing experience that she is eager to share with other students.

"I believe that no matter how big a problem is, there is always a solution to correct it," said Tequan Maduro, another Kean High School student.

Maduro and Dias as well as other students worked collaboratively to present the ideas that their group generated. Some of their ideas consisted of creating social clubs, while the small group of students from Julius Sprauve School thought of a suggestion box where students could voice their concerns in order for teachers to know what students need.

"I have attended other leadership conferences, but this one is different because it encourages you to positively influence your peers, and to believe in yourself," said Rosa Depaula, who attends CAHS.

The focus of the seminar is to build up the skills and attitudes of students who can be leaders in the fight against violence and drug use among teens, according to District Superintendent Jeannette Smith-Barry.

"The program continues during the months of November and December," Smith-Barry said. "By the end of the year, 300 young people will have had dynamic life-changing experiences that we hope will propel them into action in taking leadership roles in the fight against drugs and violence."

Not all of the students chosen to attend the seminar were at the top of their classes, according to Sharon Richardson, who helped organize the event and is director of Parent and Community Involvement.

"Problematic students were also chosen because this program will give them a chance to redirect their negative energy into positive behaviors," Richardson said.

One student gave his opinion on why he thinks many young people are delinquent in the community.

"Some students have idle minds, and once they have nothing else to do, they begin to gamble, and commit crime," said CAHS student Benjamin Hodge.