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Local program tackles teenage attitude problems

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created: 1/24/2008 9:06:35 PM
Last updated: 1/24/2008 9:45:18 PM

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Local program tackles teenage attitude problems. 9NEWS at 9 p.m. 01/24/08

DENVER – We all know there are middle school girls who have, let's say, an unpredictable personality. One local group fears that the way young teenagers act may affect the way they conduct business as adults.

The Smart-Girl program was formed by a group of successful Denver businesswomen who didn't like what they saw while ascending to the top of the corporate ladder.

"They said they watched women literally claw their way to the top and usually it was they were clawing down other women," said Sameen Noorulamin, director of programs for Smart-Girl. "And, they thought to themselves, 'Why do women behave this way towards each other?' And they said, 'This is just like middle school.'"

Smart-Girl is working with college students from the University of Colorado Denver to form a multi-level support group leading down to 7th grade girls at Kepner Middle School in west Denver.

"So, we decided we're going to start where the problem is really beginning and that's middle school. It's when these

girls are learning all these negative behaviors," said Noorulamin. "We have somehow allowed them to be nasty, to show us attitudes that we would not accept from other people."

The transformation of attitudes starts with a trickle-down approach. Trainers from Smart-Girl teach the college students from CU-Denver how to help high school students from Lincoln High School be mentors to the girls at Kepner. Every Thursday, all 150 7th graders meet with the mentors, trainers, and college students to engage in exercises which reinforce positive behavior.

"I think it's improving my leadership abilities and helping me communicate," said Sarah Jackson, a freshman psychology major at CU-Denver.

Jackson helps her Lincoln High School mentors explore subjects like bullying, gangs and body image with the younger girls.

"I think the main thing is finding out who you are," said Jackson.

The 7th grade girls learn about recognizing similar traits in others while appreciating the differences.

"It's a place where you could tell people what your feeling," said Julie Sanabria, a 7th grader at Kepner.

She appreciates being taught by the high schoolers and college students.

"It's better because it's people my age," she said.

Noorulamin says the goal is to provide the younger girls with positive role models so they understand how to achieve success without being mean.

"Change the environment, first, of the school," she said, "and then change the environment of the community."

Smart-Girl is looking to expand its partnership with CU-Denver next year. Noorulamin says they will start meeting with girls in 10 Denver schools starting in the fall.

Sanabria says it's working for her.

"I used to be one of those girls that are like, 'You're a loser and I don't want to talk to you.' Now, I say hi to everybody, talk to everybody," said Sanabria.

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