

Al Roker Speaks at TWP Teen Forum

Al Roker speaks out against violence in Norfolk



Lake Taylor High School principal, Clifton Harrison, thanks TV broadcaster Al Roker as he exits the school after giving a speech at the Teens With a Purpose forum at the Lake Taylor High School after in Norfolk. (Hyunsoo Leo Kim | The Virginian-Pilot)

By [Kathy Adams](#)

The Virginian-Pilot | © December 13, 2009 | NORFOLK

Two years ago, Alyson Ross found herself trapped in an abusive relationship. Her high school boyfriend constantly criticized and tried to control her, she said, and when she didn't comply with his demands, he pushed, grabbed and, one time, smashed her head against a wall.

Then she found Teens With a Purpose, an organization that educates teens on topics including AIDS prevention. The group gave Ross the strength, she said, to end the relationship.

Ross, now an 18-year-old senior at Landstown High School in Virginia Beach, shared her story at a forum on dating abuse and violence Saturday. Roughly 500 people, ranging from middle school students to parents, registered for the Teens With a Purpose event.

"Today" show weather and feature reporter Al Roker was the keynote speaker. He said his 22-year-old daughter has been the victim of dating violence, so he is familiar with the problem.

"The rage and the emotion is only second to the degradation and the loss of self-worth," Roker said. He encouraged the teens to seek help if they're being abused. "There is no reason to put up with it," he said. "You have to accept that it's not your fault."

The free, five-hour forum included inspirational speeches, games, music and discussions on dating violence. The central theme was respect.

Nigel "DJ Big Dose" Christopher, a deejay for 105.3 Kiss FM, talked about bullying. As a kid, he was teased for stuttering, he said.

"It just goes to show that you can take something that may be viewed as a negative and you can turn it into a positive," he said. "You really can do anything you want."

Deirdre Love, the executive director of Teens With a Purpose, started the organization roughly 12 years ago. The group promotes abstinence and nonviolence through community events and an annual forum, she said.

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