

# LOCAL TEENS WITH A PURPOSE HEADED TO POETRY COMPETITION IN CALIFORNIA

**By Rosaland Tyler**

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Deirdre Love will travel to San Francisco with a group of teenage poets on July 17 - 22, and would welcome donations to help cover expenses.

Teens with A Purpose is trying to raise about \$10,000 to cover travel expenses, said Love founder and director. Twelve people are scheduled to attend the Brave New Voices poetry competition in San Francisco that attracts young poets from all over each summer.

"We are changing the world one teen at a time," said Love, who started working with teens in 1996 when her church, The Basilica of St. Mary of The Immaculate Conception in Norfolk, was awarded a grant from the Virginia Department of Health for an AIDS ministry. The group that started with six members now has over 50 members. "I think we're getting there."

"We impact thousands of lives because our events have attracted as few as 20 people or thousands of people over the years," Love said. "It has exceeded my expectations."

Love turned the teenage church group into a non-profit into 2007 about a decade after she unsuccessfully nursed two relatives with AIDS. Love said she could not help her relatives. But she decided to help others. The group uses peer mentors, honesty and artistic performances to increase maturity.

You've probably seen Love on TV with the famous NBC weatherman Al Roker, a childhood friend. But whether



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Go on, be a teen who takes the lead! Give "Teens With a Purpose" the up to the minute news, photos and videos (funny and serious) on teen safe driving!

Love is in an elegant black dress with celebrities such as WAVY-10 news anchor Don Roberts, or Mrs. Virginia International Rebecca Crosen, Love aims to impact the lives of teens who have known adversity.

The Norfolk-based youth movement holds many events throughout the year including a silent auction and gala, poetry competitions, and workshops and events on cutting edge issues such as dating abuse and violence.

"I see a lot of people we've helped over the years," Love said. "One of our former members is running for city council. Another works with Carnival Cruise Lines. Another works with HIV issues, while another teaches special education. We have had an impact."

Emeka Onyirimba said he was shy. He joined the group. "It's changed my life," said

Onyirimba, a member of Hampton Roads Youths Poets. He will journey to San Francisco for the third time.

"I've met people from all over the world," said Onyirimba, a senior at Maury High. "I've met celebrities. I've learned the power I hold over my words. I was very timid and shy and trying to find my way. I have found people who have similar feelings."

"I believe the support system helps," Onyirimba said. "If you mess up people clap for you anyway. They are always there for you. It has gotten me through crazy moments in my life. It's an honor to represent the Hampton Roads area. I am thankful to my parents and Ms. Love. I hope we win."

The group puts a new spin on all of the negative statistics about teens. Students share their unique perspectives in public

settings and the world turns fuzzy and warm, as students use music, poetry and drama to impact lives. Confidence and insight increases as students learn from each other.

Through the support of Roker and others, Teens with A Purpose continues to grow. Roker says he participates because he feels strongly about faith-based organizations that help young people address issues such as teen dating, bullying, HIV, and more. Love said she's repaid by watching her teens "morph into the butterflies that they are."

Love hopes to start satellites in other cities like Richmond and Atlanta. But with any non-profit, community support remains the greatest need. Interested parties, both individuals and organizations, can sign up to volunteer or make donations on the TWP website, [www.twpthemovement.org](#).