

TEENS WITH A PURPOSE

# Youth workshops tackle tough topics

By Cherise M. Newsome  
*The Virginian-Pilot*

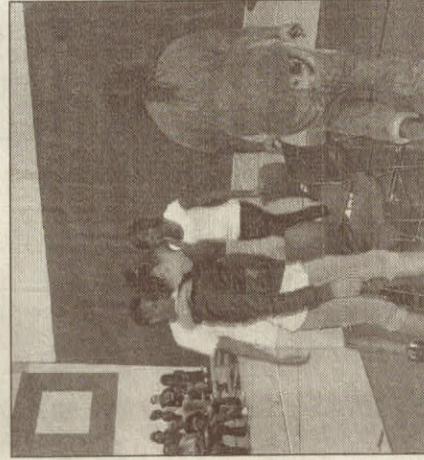
The members of Teens With A Purpose aren't afraid to talk about sex and violence with young people. So the youth advocacy group will host a series of workshops over the next few weeks to have a heart-to-heart with youngsters in a way adults may not be comfortable doing.

The peer-led sessions are called "I Am Hear," and they use entertainment, games and music to attract teens' attention to the dangers of dating violence, unsafe sex, and unhealthy relationships. The curriculum - called "Choose Respect" - was designed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Deirdre Love, founder and director of Teens With A Purpose, said they reach out to youth as young as 11 to prevent them from adopting unhealthy, disrespectful habits. For older teens, the sessions include tips on making positive choices.

At a recent "I Am Hear" program at Norview Community Center, more than 100 people gathered in the gymnasium while Under Konstruxion band played

One activity at the teen-issue seminar was a game similar to musical chairs, but the participants soon found out that it was really about the risks of sexually transmitted diseases.



COURTESY PHOTO

R&B and jazz tunes. The Hampton Roads Youth Poets also performed.

One activity was a game similar to musical chairs, but the participants soon found out that it was really about the risks of sexually transmitted diseases. The chairs represented sexual partners and ailments like AIDS and herpes. Teen facilitators explained the symptoms and how abstinence and healthy sexual behaviors can help prevent infection.

"It was shocking and gross," said 13-year old Dominique Williams who participated. But the Blair Middle student was glad to learn about the risks associated

What "I Am Hear" series on teen issues including healthy relationships and dating abuse  
When 6 p.m. Thursdays through June 10 at local community centers  
Where The next is 6 p.m. May 13 at Huntersville Community Center, 830 Goff St.  
Info: 503-1608, www.twpthemovement.org

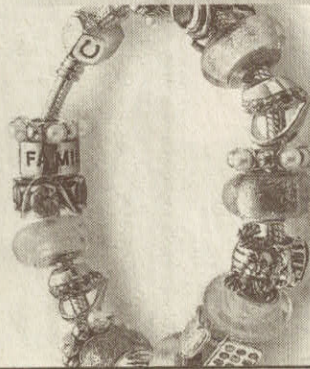
After the games, the teens and adults separated into mini-sessions. The teens discussed dating violence using the recent domestic abuse case between pop stars Chris Brown and Rihanna. In another room, adults also discussed abuse and how grown-ups often model negative behaviors.

Love, the program's director, said having an adult discussion helps make parents and youth leaders more aware of signs of abuse they may be ignoring and offers tips on how to address them.

"That will give them better skills to talk to their youth about it," she said.

Cherise M. Newsome, 446-2794, cherise.newsome@pilotonline.com

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\* All meals include a trip through the Salad Bar, and Choice of Potato (Baked, Fried, Sweet, Garlic Mashed) or Vegetable of the Day



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