

GET with the Program

By Laura Bennett-Kimble '95, Contributing Writer/Editor



The Girls Empowering Together leadership program—also known as GET—continues to make a difference in the lives of girls attending urban Grand Rapids high schools. The program itself continues to evolve, too.

Launched in fall 2007 at Central High School with the goal of increasing self-esteem in high school girls facing economic and social structure challenges, the yearlong after-school program branched out to Union High School in 2008. In the 2008-2009 school year, 27 girls successfully completed the program.

New this year, Aquinas College is offering the Twink Frey Leadership Scholarship, named in honor of Mary Caroline “Twink” Frey, to a student who has completed the GET program and been accepted to Aquinas.

Through the program, many participants begin to see their lives in different terms, according to Susan Haworth-Hoepfner, Ph.D., director of the Jane Hibbard Idema Women’s Study Center and a GET program leader. “They don’t just think about college as a possible option, but can now envision themselves as going to college with the confidence that is necessary to succeed.”

To help the girls start thinking about their future beyond high school, an Aquinas GET College Day on Feb. 4 was held to give them an opportunity to experience college life for a day, explore the campus with Aquinas student mentors, meet College personnel including administrators, and learn how to successfully apply to college. Two undergraduate students, Quiana Eagletail and Rachel

Johansen, organized the event.

GET, which began as a partnership with Grand Rapids Public Schools, has expanded to include Grand Rapids Community Media Center, which assists the girls in a documentary filmmaking project, and Girl Scouts of Michigan Shore to Shore, which provides additional leadership training as well as scholarship opportunities for the girls. Plans are underway to expand the program to Creston and Ottawa Hills high schools in coming years, Haworth-Hoepfner added.

“This program satisfies a need in the community,” she said. “It helps girls from socially and economically challenged backgrounds feel empowered to see that they can be leaders, helps them identify and hone skills and imagine how they can apply them in their day-to-day lives to envision taking on leadership roles in the future.”

Feedback from students who have completed the program, which includes historical and local information regarding female leaders, has been very positive, Haworth-Hoepfner said.

Here’s one comment from a GET graduate: “[GET] showed me different women who stood up for their rights and did great things with their leadership and showed us that you might be one person or one woman, but you can do anything. I felt like I can do pretty much anything... If those women could do things way back when and not have as many resources as we have now... what’s holding me back from accomplishing anything?”

