

Guiding and Influencing For Tomorrow (GIFT)

Project by: Darlene Comish, Ashleigh Murdock, Mike Allen, and Antonio Sudduth

In preparing for our group project, we looked at many different opportunities. The topic of mentoring came up in many conversations. Mentoring was talked about in many of our leadership sessions, and one speaker encouraged us to become good leaders by helping encourage youth to reach their full potential. We found this was a good fit for our team since Antonio Sudduth, a member of our group, talked about how mentoring had helped him succeed in his life and endeavors.

Our plan was to get together with the after school program at Starkville High School. Since Darlene Comish is a member of the Advisory Board, we thought this would be a good way to test our program. We also believed if this went well with the after school program that there may be a need in the high school as well, and this could easily be expanded to reach more students.

On May 12, 2009, with the cooperation of assistant principal Debbie Thomas and the After School Coordinator Vera Miles, our team met at the Starkville High School at 3 p.m. to assist with the After School Program. Our goal was to present inspirational speakers, a life challenge, and some refreshments to students who were in this program. We wanted to encourage the students to think big, be creative, stay in school, and make the most out of their lives both now and in the future.

Almost 30 students were in attendance on this day, and they were both attentive and responsive participants in our program. Dr. Steven Middleton, Director of the African American Studies Center at Mississippi State University, was our featured

speaker. He spoke on the importance of setting goals and aiming high in life. Also speaking was our own Antonio Sudduth who told his personal story of finding success in Starkville. Ashleigh Murdock prepared worksheets and information on how to work with team members and discussed diversity issues and working with people of various backgrounds. Students were awarded door prizes based on the answers to the questions. Darlene Comish, with assistance from the rest of the team, popped popcorn and served refreshments.

In all areas we were welcomed by the Starkville High School staff and encouraged to come back. The staff seemed pleased with our efforts and expressed hope that this program would be continued. Judging by the faces of the students involved, we feel it was a success for them as well.

Our plan for the future is to contact the new principal and after school coordinator to see what the need is for Starkville High School students and to see if we can set up a time line to continue this program. We would also like to see other FORUM students or graduates get involved as well. Our suggested time frame would be to present a program with a guest speaker on a quarterly basis and at the end of the year hold a banquet and encourage all speakers and students to participate. We also know there may be a need to do one-on-one mentoring as well.

We feel there is a great need for a program that is sustainable in our school systems, and we hope to be able to cooperate with the schools to make this happen. We feel that we can show students that everyone has to start somewhere, and no one was born a leader. Instead, it is by one's own perseverance and the choices one makes that ultimately take him or her in the right or wrong direction. Unfortunately, in our society

today, without someone showing our youth the path to take to get ahead, all can be lost.

As a leadership group, we see the need to make a difference in Starkville, Mississippi, by

Guiding and Influencing for Tomorrow.

Respectfully Submitted,

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