

G.E.M.S.

Girls Empowered To Make Success

Annual Report

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by

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Purpose

The purpose of this report is to describe the activities and outcomes of the GEMS (Girls Empowered To Move Toward Success) program during SFY 2006. The goal of GEMS is to promote positive life choices in the sisters or other close family members of pregnant or parenting adolescent girls. Health promotion, avoidance of non-marital sexual activity, connection to the community, development of leadership skills, and identification of future goals are encouraged through group meetings, mentoring relationships, and volunteer community projects.

This evaluation focuses on three aspects of the program corresponding to implementation and outcomes of participants and a third component added this year to discern how participants feel about GEMS. The first set of data provides information to answer whether the program was implemented as intended in the *Program Implementation* section of this report. The second set of data addresses whether the program produced the desired impact on participants in the *Program Outcomes* section of this report and a third section summarizes the results of key informant interviews that describe what participants say about the program. The methodology for this evaluation is modeled on evaluations of best practices in this field, which is relatively new. To understand GEMS it is important to understand the history and development of programs designed for youth as a whole.

Background and Significance

America takes pride in its commitment and capacity to protect the nation's most vulnerable citizens. In response to an increase in poor social indicators in the 1950's, several large-scale

federal initiatives were implemented in 1966 as part of President Johnson's *Great Society* and *War on Poverty* initiatives. Although the primary goal of the legislation that supported these initiatives was urban renewal, social service programs to reduce juvenile delinquency and "improve youth character" were major components of most projects.

Trepidation over poor social outcomes for many of America's youth continued into the 1970's, while trends in non-marital births, poverty, divorce and single parenthood increased in men and women of all ages. As outcome indicators for youth worsened over time, youth development and prevention efforts came under fire for failing to produce desired results.

Since early approaches to reduce negative outcomes for adolescents grew out of these efforts, programs for youth tended to focus on a reducing a single behavioral risk. By the 1980's, David Hawkins and Richard Catalano offered a new perspective to the fields of prevention and youth development¹. Hawkins and Catalano urged program managers to consider the social and environmental context of children in program development, positing that a common set of risk factors related to families, schools, communities and peer groups, are linked to multiple problems that interfere with healthy development and transitions into adulthood. Drug use, teen pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, school failure, and delinquent behavior share the same risk factors. Hawkins and Catalano also reasoned that a common set of protective factors shield youth from making harmful choices.

Best Practices in the 21st Century draw upon the lessons learned from the past and the science of today to prescribe effective youth development interventions. Current strategies call for a

broader focus that address multiple risk factors and enhance protective factors. It is also important to understand that a “problem-free” child is not necessarily equipped to handle the responsibilities of adulthood, therefore, programs that promote children’s social, emotional, behavioral, and cognitive development are encouragedⁱⁱ. In 2002, Virginia’s Governor’s Office for Substance Abuse Prevention brought 13 state agencies together to monitor the implementation of prevention programs in Virginia in order to address Virginia’s prevention priorities of 1) Assessing community needs 2) Prioritizing needs 3) Developing measurable goals and objectives of prevention programs 4) Selecting best practices to replicate 4) Collaborating to sustain projects and 5) Evaluation of programsⁱⁱⁱ. The GEMS program aims to increase the protective factors for these young teens.

In the National Campaign To Prevent Teen Pregnancy publication entitled, *No Easy Answers*, researchers posit, “Teen pregnancy is not a random event; it is linked to a known set of factors that increase its likelihood.”^{iv} In studies that are especially significant to GEMS, the association between increased risk for teen pregnancy between siblings of pregnant teens has been studied by Patricia East, PhD, at the University of California, Department of Pediatrics. In a controlled study, Dr. East compared attitudes and perceptions towards school, career, and childbearing of younger siblings of pregnant or parenting teens and younger siblings of non-pregnant and non-parenting teens. In this study, siblings of pregnant or parenting teens viewed “school and career goals as unnecessary if they have seen their sister attain adult status and recognition through parenthood instead of through educational or career achievements”. These siblings were also younger at sexual debut, had higher rates of sexual activity, accepting of non-marital adolescent

childbearing, and pessimistic about school and career options, with higher rates of school truancy, school suspension and cigarette use^v.

The GEMS (Girls Empowered to Move toward Success) Program at the Virginia Department of Health, seeks to promote positive life choices in the younger sisters of pregnant or parenting teens using a youth development approach. The framework for GEMS is similar to that of a national demonstration project funded by the United States Department of Health and Human Services entitled, *Girl Neighborhood Power! – Building Bright Futures for Success (GNP)*. The National Campaign To Reduce Teen Pregnancy recognized GNP as a promising practice in youth development programs after reviewing over 75 of the countries most rigorously evaluated programs^{vi}.

Teen pregnancy and other poor outcomes for youth appear to arise from a confluence of factors, that are complex and solutions should address the complex nature of the problem. Youth development programs that address an array of issues, rather than focusing on one single risk factor (such as delaying sexual initiation or using effective contraception) show promise. While current research shows programs that address multiple risk factors and engage youth over extended periods of time “show promise” on the national level, rigorous evaluations of these types of programs usually involve the use of control groups and are expensive to implement.

Program Implementation

Data was collected on a total of 113 girls, aged 9 – 19 at the beginning of the program year (July 1, 2006). The average age of GEMS program participants was 14, with 85% of all participants

between the ages of nine and sixteen. Overall, fifty-four percent of participants have been enrolled in the program since 2004, with the highest retention rates in the Charlottesville, Richmond and Piedmont sites. Since one of the features of effective youth development programs is to retain participants over time, it would be useful to examine specific practices and characteristics of these programs to identify effective strategies to retain high-risk youth in prevention programs to infuse lessons learned into program guidelines.

Standard components of the GEMS program are, 1) Group Meetings, 2) Meetings with individual mentors and 3) Volunteer Activities. It should be noted that while group meetings and volunteer projects are each counted as one activity “hour”, they often range between 2 and 3 hours for every time. Contacts with mentors vary in actual time spent as well. Overall there were 2,072 group-meeting contacts, with the average participant attending 18 group meetings in the past year. Meetings with mentors totaled 1,482 with an average of 17 individual meetings per participant. Volunteer activities totaled 1,915 hours, with an average of 13 hours per participant. For all components, there were 5,469-recorded contacts with participants. This figure (5,469) represents an estimate of the actual time spent providing direct services and it should be noted that programs in the formative phase of development, such as GEMS, data is often under reported. However, using this estimate, each participant received an average of 48 direct services contact “hours” during the reporting period. This is approximately the same level of contact participants experienced in SFY2005, just with one more hour, on the average, in volunteer activities and a little less time with the mentor.

Program Outcomes

Considerable research suggests that substance abuse (smoking, drinking alcohol, and using drugs) among teens is a risk factor for a variety of problems, including teen pregnancy, poor success in school (including dropping out), and later life problems. Accordingly, the GEMS program addresses these issues. When evaluating the impact the GEMS programs had on participants, it must be kept in mind the GEMS program is a prevention program. That is, the program is intended to prevent problems before they occur. Girls are referred to the program because an older sister/relative was pregnant as a teenager. The girls who participate may or may not be exhibiting maladaptive behaviors when they enroll. They may be perfectly well-adjusted, showing no signs of problems. For such girls, program success is indicated by a lack of change. This is in contrast to the goals of many treatment focused programs in which the reduction of undesirable behaviors is a goal.

All sites met or exceeded their enrollment goals. Research in youth development programs shows that multiple risk factors contribute to adverse outcomes. GEMS measures smoking, alcohol use, sexual activity, absenteeism, school performance, and the age participants expect to have their first child. The challenge of youth development programs is to prevent risky behaviors during a time when many adolescents experiment with each of the behaviors listed above. At the final interviews for SFY 2006, 96% (105 of 113) have not used tobacco products, 97% (110 of 113) have not used alcohol, 97% (110 of 113) had not used drugs, and 95% said they have not had initiated sexual activity. During the reporting period it appears there was a reduction in the use of tobacco products. No teens were reported pregnant during SFY 2006.

Data is also collected regarding the participant's attitudes towards attending college, whether they plan to continue in the program and when they plan to have children. Ninety-four percent of participants (106 of 113) said they planned to attend college. Half of participants said they did not plan to have children. Only 2% said they planned to have children before the age of 20. Other respondents said the average age they would have children was 24-29, which follows with their plans to attend college. Data collected on "Continue" in program less complete, however, most sites reported their participants planned to continue in the program.

Academic grades were calculated by assigning scores to the grading scale: A = 4, B = 3, C = 2, D = 1 and F = 0. When a range of grades was provided, an average was used for this analysis. Using this methodology, the overall grade point average of GEMS participants during the reporting period was 2.45 , just below a C+ average. Fifty students reported a C average, and data for 12 students was unknown, and excluded from the analysis.

Number of days missed in school is an important predictor for school performance. In this analysis, data was available for 101 participants. During SFY 2006, 9% of GEMS were not absent from school at all. Fifty percent (56 of 111) missed less than five days in school. Fourteen girls (13%) missed between 5 and 10 days of school. Five percent missed more than 15 days of school. In school suspensions and out of school suspensions are not currently captured. The program did not meet the program goal (85%) on this measure.

All participants identified personal goals for their participation in the GEMS program and were rated by the coordinators as making progress toward the goal and having realistic expectations.

Program Activities

GEMS local programs vary considerably in content and structure. However the overall focus is on health promotion, avoidance of non-marital sexual activity, connection to the community, development of leadership skills, and identification of future goals are encouraged through group meetings, mentoring relationships, and volunteer community projects. All GEMS programs incorporated educational sessions into group meeting to meet these program criteria. Many GEMS programs have established partnerships with community agencies and individuals that provide support for GEMS group meetings.

Health Education and Career Education

While each GEMS site is unique in the types of activities of group meetings, the topics of self esteem, leadership, the importance of education and exposure to different careers are consistent across all programs. A more complete list of educational topics offered through group meetings is listed in Appendix A of this report. Group meeting topics such as, “Emergency Preparedness Training” was provided by staff from the Red Cross. Similarly, individuals from local health agencies and colleges may provide health education topics such as nutrition education, or how to take care of oneself through diet and exercise. GEMS programs also incorporate activities to enhance literacy, such as Book Clubs. Ongoing activities also take place during group meeting sessions, such as creating scrapbooks, making holiday gifts for soldiers serving in Afghanistan, valentines for members of adult homes and making products to sell. Participants are involved in the planning of group meetings. Activities completed in group meetings will often expand into volunteer projects.

Community Service

Volunteer community services are an important aspect of the GEMS program and in some instances. These projects provide the young teens with an opportunity to make and carry out plans, to take initiative, learn to work as a group, to solve conflicts, to experiment with leadership roles, to explore a new setting/role, and to reflect on the outcome of the event. An example of this is, several GEMS programs are involved in visiting nursing homes or other adult care facilities with their participants. While the participants initially expressed displeasure with the idea of visiting these types of facilities, now they look forward to the visits, and make use of some group meetings to prepare gifts for individuals with whom they have established relationships. Patriotic volunteer activities are common, as well as using GEMS participants to assist with registration or other logistics of charity events such as the March of Dimes Walk For Premature Births, and the MS Bike Tour. A more complete list of volunteer activities is provided in Appendix A.

In addition to the local community service and educational activities, all the local sites joined together this year for a statewide project, a DVD targeting teen girls with health promotion information entitled “Girls Empowered for Bright Futures”. Adolescence is a time of physical, social, mental and emotional change and a time with high rates of preventable injuries. There is great concern about the increase in obesity, diabetes and the costs of chronic diseases such as asthma and cardiovascular diseases for women. Yet, less than 40% of the teens, regardless of insurance access, have annual checkups as recommended by the *Bright Futures Guidelines*. Thus, at a time of greatest vulnerability and at time when they are setting their health habits for adulthood, most teens do not have the benefit of receiving health information and assessment for

risks from a knowledgeable source. The DVD educational project had the goal of a) educating the GEMS teens themselves and other teens about the importance of regular, preventive health care and b) identifying solutions to barriers teens experience in obtaining health care. In addition, the creation of this audio-visual offered the GEMS girls the opportunity to explore possible careers connected to the film and public media businesses through local speakers and field trips. In 2001, *Bright Futures Guidelines* were adopted by Virginia as the state standard for child and adolescent health care. With the purposes of encouraging teens to take responsibility for their health care and health choices, the six Bright Futures core concepts (partnership, communication, health promotion, education, time management and advocacy) are described in the DVD. An interview with a nurse practitioner is used as a demonstration of asking questions of a health care provider. Barriers teens perceive are presented to be used as stimulus for discussion. Each GEMS girl was given a copy of the DVD after it was “premiered” at the statewide leadership training. In addition, the DVD will be available as a discussion tool for use by school health classes and community groups such as scouts, clubs or church groups.

Key Informant Interviews

Key informant interviews were conducted with approximately 20 GEMS participants at the statewide conference at James Madison University. Interview respondents represented both urban and rural areas of GEMS programs. The interview process was exploratory in nature, and as expected, interviewees answers to questions led in different directions, however, several themes emerged. The results are described below:

- The average time in program – 2 years, except one teen who had just entered the program. The results of her interview are excluded from this summary.

- All participants reported the community service component of the program was of great value. The opportunity to do something (e.g. go to a different place, see different people (speakers) was especially appealing.
- All girls said the program helped them with school, even though they may have not been getting special tutorial help, as were some girls. These girls said they performed better in school because as one participant put it, she “learned about things that can get you in trouble”, referring to her peer group. One older participant said, “Forget my friends, I’ve got to do my homework!”.
- Many participants also reported there was less tension at home. All participants reported an improvement in getting along with family members. Older participants also reported helping with household chores and taking care of younger siblings, which result in more family cohesion and less family tension. Older respondents with younger siblings not in GEMS said they wanted their younger siblings to enroll in the program.
- GEMS participants overwhelmingly agreed that community service activities were most beneficial. Community service opportunities seemed to provide a venue for discussion that reinforced health education topics in addition to establishing connections to the community.
- All interviewees expressed deep gratitude for the presence of the GEMS program in their lives. One older teen said that GEMS “saved my life”. Many of these girls expressed the same kind of sentiment. Another teen said, “All we need is a chance. GEMS gives us a chance. Plant a seed and watch it grow!”

The leadership conference at James Madison University (JMU) was well planned and well executed. Also, approximately 75 girls aged 9-19 from five of the six sites and their coordinators and mentors attended the first statewide conference. The two-day program is attached in Appendix C. For many of the girls this was their first time on a college campus. Opportunities in public speaking, group work and in personal development were planned. The program included get acquainted activities led by the JMU recreation department staff, a presentation about accepting diversity by a VCU psychology professor, presentation by each site about their volunteer activities, speeches by 2 JMU student athletes about the importance of striving to reach goals, a talent show, classes on nutrition, life planning, women as leaders and conflict resolution and a closing inspirational speech. JMU Nursing School provided the first aid services. All GEMS program participants enthusiastically said they wanted more of this kind of activity and overwhelmingly requested complete tours of higher educational facilities. Respondents also said they wished more JMU students were on campus to view student interaction with the environment.

Noteworthy observations: the facilitator for the Nutrition Workshop said this group of girls knew far more about nutrition than other girls their age. The breadth of the participant's knowledge surprised the facilitator. All girls behaved very well and in fact, different groups interacted, with no problems, and plenty of joy and respect demonstrated at all times. Older girls encouraged younger girls to display talents and supported their comments in group, which is somewhat surprising because of the differences in age, experiences, etc.

Summary

The GEMS program has been implemented as designed, and has outcomes that demonstrate a high percentage of program participants abstained from high-risk behaviors. In addition, program participants overwhelmingly endorsed the program, stating the benefits to family and peer interactions and community involvement and performance in school. Program participants also requested interventions of this kind be made available to their younger siblings.

Recommendations

Data for the GEMS program demonstrates that the program is implemented as conceived and that participants demonstrated positive behavioral outcomes. All GEMS project sites need annual review sessions of program requirements and how to report standard program data.

GEMS coordinators should meet quarterly (in person or by PolyCam) to share ideas for projects and collection of data as they did at the James Madison University meeting and at the June Richmond meeting. One site developed a participant feedback form this year that all sites will be using in the coming year.

References

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2. Positive Youth Development in the U.S: Research Findings on Evaluations of Positive Youth Development Programs: Executive Summary, The State of the Field, 1999.
3. About the GOSAP Collaborative, Governor's Office for Substance Abuse Prevention, 2006.
4. No Easy Answers: Research Findings On Programs to Reduce Teen Pregnancy (Summary), Douglas Kirby, PhD., A Research Review commissioned by the National Campaign To Reduce Teen Pregnancy, Task Force on Effective Programs and Research, Washington, D.C., March 1997.

5. Sisters' and Girlfriends' Sexual and Childbearing Behavior: Effects on Early Adolescent Girls' Sexual Outcomes, Patricia L. East, Marianne E. Felice, Maria C. Morgan, *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, Vol. 55, No. 4 (Nov., 1993) , pp. 953-963.

6. A National Strategy to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, Annual Report, U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1999.

Appendix A

Group Meeting Educational Activities

Life Skills Summer Program (with Virginia Commonwealth University)
GEMS 2nd Annual Girls Health and Wellness Expo (with Richmond YWCA)
Self Defense Classes with Jow Ga Kung Fu (8 weeks self defense and fitness class)
Poetry writing
Resume preparation
Mock Job Interviews
Domestic Violence Awareness
Making Difficult Choices
Exercise
Nutrition
Black History
Safe Dating
Emergency Preparedness Training
On Becoming A Woman
Mind Body Spirit (healthy lifestyles)
Monthly Newsletter
Healthy Cooking Classes
Weekly Tutoring
Dance and Yoga Classes
Art Reach (self esteem through creative expression)
Abstinence curriculum (Managing Pressures before Marriage – includes substance abuse prevention, sexuality, body image, etc)
Job placement
Impact of alcohol on academic and employment
Create Floral Arrangements (Christmas, Valentine and Spring themes)
Developing a Business Plan (collaboration with St. Paul College)
Marketing
Participate in National Student Entrepreneurial Competition
Public Speaking
Careers In Broadcasting and Journalism
Things That Are Important To Me (Scrapbook)
Making Holiday Gifts and Ornaments
Cultural and Recreational Field Trips
Hygiene
Outdoor recreation and physical fitness activities
Health and Nutrition Topics
Tours of local facilities

Appendix A (continued)

Volunteer Activities

Correspondence with troops in Afghanistan
Visit young gun shot victim in local nursing home regularly
Deliver gifts to adult homes (GEMS groups go and play games with residents, do hair and nails of residents, read and talk)
Work with the African American Elks Club (this will help disadvantaged youth through scholarships)
Participate in Wellness Challenge
Bake sales for victims of Katrina
Volunteer at March of Dimes Walk
Job placement opportunities
Appalachian Children's Theatre (learn audition techniques, public speaking, leadership)
American Business Woman – work with members to learn about careers
Reach Out And Read
Toastmasters
ARTS 180 – cultural enrichment
Conference in DC – There's No Room For Pain
Regional Youth Summit
Patriotism Project
Local health district Emergency Preparedness Dispensing Clinic

APPENDIX B

ACTIVITIES IN FY2006 BY SITE

Submitted by the local coordinators

ALEXANDRIA

The following activities were conducted

Bookclub

Academic Enhancement Activities

Nature Trail Activity

Cultural and Recreational Field Trips

AmeriGroup provided speakers to talk about hygiene

CHARLOTTESVILLE

Each participant in the program has received an objective assessment of skill levels and service needs; this assessment has been used to develop an Individual Service Strategy by TEENSIGHT staff, the participant and her parents. The Individual Service Strategy outlines clear goals for the future (including an employment goal), and outlines the objectives needed to be met in order to achieve these goals.

GEMS participants meet every Monday night for tutoring by University of Virginia students. After school programs are also held on Wednesdays. Dance/yoga classes are held once a month, and Art Reach, a program which teaches self-esteem through art projects, is held every other month. "The Managing Pressures before Marriage" abstinence curriculum is taught along with discussions about sexuality; body image; substance abuse; nutrition; aids; smoking and other risk factors which may impede the long term success of the participant achieving her goals. Individual counseling by mentors is held on a weekly basis. Development of positive self-concept and improvement of decision-making skills have improved and continue to improve through various community projects.

Participants made and sold cookies in order to raise money for the Hurricane Katrina victims. On April 20th, 2006, GEMS participants volunteered their time with the local chapter of the March of Dimes Walk.

TEENSIGHT has received an anonymous grant in the amount of \$10,000. This grant will be used to place GEMS participants and participants in other TEENSIGHT programs into summer employment. Work sites include Martha Jefferson Hospital, the City of Charlottesville government offices and the University of Virginia libraries.

LENOWISCO

During the past year, the GEMS program offered the girls enrolled in the program the opportunity to participate in an enriched summer program that offered cooking and nutrition

classes, 2 separate college and career exploration programs, and volunteer activities. Throughout the year, the girls have been offered tutoring assistance, assistance with applying for employment, applying for college, scholarships and grants, and assistance in accessing counseling services. Three of the girls in the program are employed part-time after school. One of the girls will be graduating this year, and plans to attend a community college.

PIEDMONT

Longwood University intern worked with GEMS participants from October 2005 to February 2006. She conducted sessions on the impact of alcohol on their academic and employment future.

GEMS participants designed and created unique floral arrangements using ballpoint pens. The arrangements had a Christmas, Valentine and Spring theme, and were given as gifts to teachers, and community leaders. The girls also sold a number of the arrangements and made additional money for additional activities.

St. Paul College SIFE program (Students In Free Enterprise) worked with GEMS to help them develop a business plan and showed them how to develop marketing strategies. St. Paul SIFE students came to the GEMS meetings and explained free enterprise and marketing and production. They also took the product (ballpoint pen floral arrangement) to the local Wal-Mart store to solicit their assistance in selling the items once enough have been made. St. Paul displayed the floral arrangements at the national student entrepreneurial competition in Chicago. Although GEMS participants are too young to participate, they earned honorable mention for the uniqueness of the product.

One of the GEMS participants was placed in WHO's WHO among high school students and earned special recognition for her outstanding leadership and public speaking skills.

A CNN Intern met with the GEMS to discuss her experiences with broadcast journalism and also to prep them for the documentary they were participating in.

PULASKI COUNTY

Because transportation in rural areas such as Pulaski County is an obstacle for adolescent participation in group activities, the GEMS Program partnered with Pulaski Middle School in the spring of 2004 where after school meetings are currently held. School counselors and educators at the Middle School are enthusiastic and supportive of the Program. In addition to providing a classroom for conducting GEMS meetings, school personnel act as a referral source, and contribute school related information when appropriate. Currently 10 girls are enrolled in the Program with an average meeting attendance of 5. The group meets regularly during the school year; but, due to transportation issues and complex summer schedules of the participants, it meets less frequently and usually with fewer participants during the summer.

The GEMS worked throughout the year to prepare a scrapbook. The theme for the scrapbook project was "Things that are important to me." The scrapbooks provided many opportunities for group discussion of goals and dreams, self-esteem, and family and community connectedness.

At the request of the GEMS participants, the patriotism project continued for a second year. The New River Health District Business Manager who is also serving in the National Guard was a guest speaker at a GEMS Meeting. At subsequent meetings the girls prepare a Christmas tree and made ornaments that were shipped to a troop in Afghanistan. The troop responded by preparing a DVD to thank the GEMS for their show of support and also to educate all of us on life in the military.

Growth, maturity, and self-esteem were ongoing themes throughout the year with the Mentors, Coordinator, and guest speakers providing interactive and thought provoking sessions.

Several meetings focused on potential career goals. Guest speakers represented health care professions, the military, and the business community.

The GEMS traveled to a local animal hospital for a guided tour by the veterinarian.

The GEMS participated in the New River Health District EP & R Dispensing Drill during October.

The GEMS hand crafted Valentines for residents of four local adult homes as an effort to reach out to others in the community. They followed with computer generated Easter cards for residents of one of the facilities.

RICHMOND

The current funding year began with *A Life Skills Summer Program* facilitated by Virginia Commonwealth University. The GEMS 2nd annual Girls Health and Wellness Expo at the YMCA with competitive exercise routines and interactive discussions on healthy relationships ended the summer programs.

During the first quarter, they completed three community service projects, and one fifteen-year old landed a job because of her community service with GEMS.

One of our girls and her mother joined the Jow Ga Kung Fu organization as a result of an eight-week fitness and self defense class they participated in last FY.

One of our participants continues to write poetry as an escape from a dire living situation, and we will have a finished booklet of poems by the end of this FY.

They've prepared resumes and participated in mock interviews. Later, we invited professionals according to the girls' career choices to make a presentation about their careers and talk individually with the girls.

The GEMS were privy to be a part of the *Regional Youth Summit* with one of our girls being chosen to be a group leader after receiving training. Other topics have included *Domestic Violence Awareness, Making Difficult Choices, Exercise, Nutrition, Black History celebration, A*

Safe Dating series, a *Youth Peace Summit*, *self- image* and an interactive, *There's No Room for Pain Conference in D.C.* where they each earned community service hours.

The GEMS have participated in a two-part emergency preparedness training at the American Red Cross.

They continue to maintain their four-year relationship with the retired school teacher who they have adopted as a grandmother figure; we celebrated her 96th birthday with her in February at the adult home where she resides. She always shares wisdom on good citizenship, lady-like behavior and the importance of aiming for higher education.

Upon completion of a survey by and discussion with the GEMS participants, it was verified that they embrace community service projects and look forward to the next one. These activities have sharpened their awareness of needs in the community, and challenge them to be a viable part of making positive changes in the lives of others. At times the service project has served to open their minds to different cultures as well as the arts.
