

Program encourages Girl Scouts to explore 'inner FaB'

Christine McCall

At only 9 years old, Leslie Roman is learning hands-on that she has what it takes to be a good role model.

She is a member of FaB Factor, a new program created by the Girl Scouts of Eastern Massachusetts that tries to give girls between the ages of 5 and 17 years old a way to discover their "inner fabulousness."

Leslie views the time she spends with her FaB Factor friends as a time and a place to help other people.

"I think it's good for me because I'll be a role model," she said. "I like that because the [younger kids] look up to me. If they have a problem they come talk to me. It makes me feel independent."

FaB Factor is being introduced in communities that are experiencing one or more of the following issues:

- In the top 25 for teen pregnancy rates
- All three 10th grade MCAS test scores are below the state average
- Grades 9-12 drop-out rates are above the state average
- Population of low-income students is higher than the state average
- Juvenile assaults by girls are increasingly likely to take place based on combinations of public safety and crime statistics

According to Kimberly E. Zouzoua, director of community collaborations for Girl Scouts of Eastern Massachusetts, FaB Factor was developed as a means for girls to learn how

to be confident in themselves and the decisions they make. She also stressed the importance of the program teaching the girls leadership.

Last Thursday, the United South End Settlements FaB Factor group met for an hour and worked on an activity promoting self-esteem. The group of about 20 was initially separated

into four smaller groups and each table of girls was responsible for drawing the shell of a girl. They were then instructed to write words that describe a positive role model on the inside of the shell and negative attributes on the outside.

Leslie took initiative at her table only seconds after the activity began as she began spouting off both positive and negative character traits. "Respect," "kind" and "helpful" were the first few words that came out of her mouth.

When asked why she chose "respect," Leslie said, "We think we should always respect someone."

The entire group reconvened in a circle on the floor around a life size drawing of a girl to share the positive and negative attributes they came up with in their smaller groups. As the girls took turns going around the circle and sharing their thoughts, a few of the positive characteristics that came up were "adventurous," "good attitude," "caring" and "confidence."

Among the negative words were bullying, fighting, dishonest and disrespectful.

At the conclusion of the activity,

Crystal Williams, diversity facilitator for Girl Scouts of Eastern Massachusetts, told the girls that the life size drawing represented all of the girls in the room and qualities that they should work on. Before the girls left the room, Williams reminded them that "every Girl Scout is a positive role model."

Currently, there are more than 1,500 girls participating in the program. A year-round FaB Factor curriculum exists for each age group, but the scope of the activities can change once the facilitators, Girl Scouts of Eastern Massachusetts trained staff, gauge the girls' interests on various topics.

"It's fun because it's just girls," Leslie said. She said she likes the FaB Factor environment because she feels comfortable and can talk about girlie stuff like shopping and what she does on the weekends.

The conversation goes deeper than shopping though and Leslie says that she's learned "to respect others and to treat each girl like a sister."

She added, "Even when we fight, we're still friends and we love each other."

Not only do the girls learn about and develop their "inner FaB," but they are also making new circles of friends and learning to work together in groups in a positive environment where they can be heard.

"I've seen a lot of growth with them as a group," Karen Liberatore, after school program site coordinator at United South End Settlements said. "They're all playing together. They've all bonded."



For more information about FaB

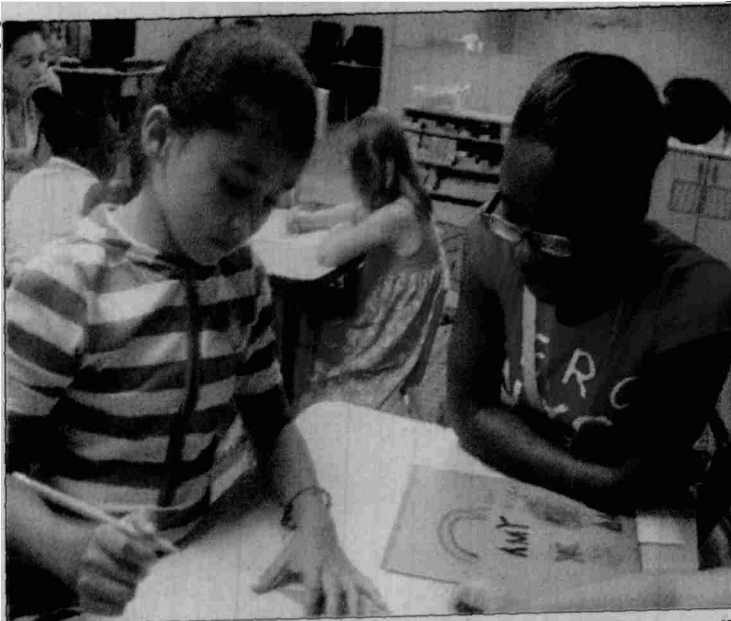
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Factor and other Girl Scouts programming, visit <http://www.girlscoutseastern-mass.org> or contact Kimberly E. Zouzoua

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kids] look up to me. If they have a problem they come talk to me. It makes me feel independent."

— Leslie Roman



Dacia Jordan (r), 15, watches Leslie Roman, 9, as she works diligently on a self-esteem exercise at last week's FaB Factor session at United South End Settlements. (Stacy Wilbur photo)

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