

The Record

[Print](#) | [Close](#)

Emotional issues take center stage

Sunday, November 11, 2007

By **MAYA KREMEN**
STAFF WRITER

TEANECK -- It's rare that the mother of a boy killed by gang violence and a former gang member meet in a room.

But on Saturday they shared a stage for a common cause: to talk to the black community about what is happening in the black community.

Speaking to a crowd of more than 250 at the Teaneck Marriott at Glenpointe, Pamela Johnson, whose 15-year-old son was shot by three alleged gang members at a 2006 party in Teaneck, urged other parents to not to lose track of their children.

Daushaun "Jiwe" Morris spoke about joining the Bloods gang in Newark at age 10. Jail was his wakeup call, he said.

"I understood what I was doing was an illness," he said. "I wanted to add to the community I helped tear down."

The anti-gang panel was part of a symposium organized by the Bergen/ Passaic Chapter of the National Coalition of 100 Black Women. It was the third such event, and it drew the largest crowd so far. During panels and workshops, participants tried to think of concrete ways the community could help itself.

Instead of blaming outside sources, the community needs to look within itself for a cure, said the Rev. DeForest B. Soaries Jr., senior pastor of the First Baptist Church of Lincoln Gardens in Somerset. One way he suggested they do that was to pay more attention to the negative images of women and blacks portrayed in rap music, television and movies.

"Nobody is going to respect us if we don't respect ourselves," he said.

Speaking out about injustices, such as the recent Don Imus slur, also is important, he said. Imus used derogatory language to describe Rutgers' female basketball players, leading to his dismissal from CBS. He has since been hired at WABC.

To ensure a positive self-image, panelists emphasized the importance of parents' consistent presence in children's daily lives.

"Ask them about what their high point and what their low point was," suggested Terrie M. Williams, a public relations director and mental health advocate. Parents should also share the ins and outs of their own days with their children. Without that attention, children will seek it elsewhere, she said.

That's what Morris said he did. The son of a crack addict and an absent father, he thought of his gang as a surrogate family. He suggested that other young men start small: Try to have dinner with their children, get proper identification cards and open bank accounts.

"It's little victories like that that can get us to the ultimate goal: feeling like men in our households," he said.

Bronx resident Jean Burgess, who attended the event with her son, daughters and husband, said she had learned about "the importance of keeping lines of communication open."

Attendees also got tips about financial planning, grandparenting, mental health and investing in art during a series of morning workshops.

Rita Williams-Bogar, a former chapter president, said the point of the event was to show people an array of ways to empower themselves.

"You always hear, 'Someone needs to do something about it,' " she said. "We are those people. We see something, we address it."

E-mail: kremenm@northjersey.com

Copyright © 2007 North Jersey Media Group Inc.
[Copyright Infringement Notice](#) [User Agreement & Privacy Policy](#)

[Print](#) | [Close](#)