

Enhancing Leadership and Development Opportunities for Young Women

Morgan Walker

PVAMU Extension-Community & Economic Development Unit , Prairie View A&M University, Beaumont, TX, 77701

Abstract

The Young Women's Empowerment Group is a transformative initiative aimed at equipping middle school girls in Beaumont, Texas with essential life and leadership skills to foster personal growth and resilience. This program, a collaboration between Extension Agent Morgan Walker and Odom Academy Middle School Social Worker Shirley Alexander, supplied a safe and supportive environment for five young women often labeled as troubled teens. Over the course of four sessions, participants engaged in classes on Goal Setting, Financial Literacy, Dressing for Success, and Pitching. Each class was designed to address critical skills and knowledge areas, helping the participants envision and work toward a successful future. Goal-setting workshops encouraged self-reflection and actionable planning, while financial literacy sessions provided foundational tools for managing money effectively. Dressing for success-built confidence and professional awareness, and pitching exercises developed communication and presentation skills. The program culminated in a celebratory graduation ceremony, supplying an opportunity to recognize the participants' achievements and foster a sense of community. By empowering these young women with practical skills and confidence, the program proved the power of collaboration and mentorship in shaping brighter futures. This poster presentation highlights the structure, outcomes, and broader implications of the Young Women's Empowerment Group, highlighting how targeted youth programs can create lasting impacts in communities.

Introduction

Adolescence is a pivotal stage for building confidence, resilience, and vision for the future. The Young Women's Empowerment Group was launched in Beaumont, Texas, as a collaborative initiative between Extension Agent Morgan Walker and Odom Academy Middle School Social Worker Shirley Alexander. The program aimed to empower middle school girls labeled as at-risk by providing a safe, supportive environment for developing leadership and life skills.

Objective

Many young women face barriers to personal growth due to limited access to mentorship and skill-building opportunities. This program addresses those gaps by engaging participants in a structured four-week workshop series focused on Goal Setting, Financial Literacy, Dressing for Success, and Pitching.

Hypothesis

Participation in a structured empowerment program that provides life and leadership skills in a supportive environment will increase confidence, self-awareness, and future readiness among middle school girls identified as at-risk.

Methods

The Young Women's Empowerment Group was conducted over four weekly sessions at Odom Academy Middle School in Beaumont, Texas. The program served five middle school girls, identified by school staff as students needing additional support in personal development and leadership. Each session focused on a specific life skill:

- Session 1: Goal Setting – Students reflected on personal goals and created action plans.
- Session 2: Financial Literacy – Participants learned basic budgeting, saving, and money management.
- Session 3: Dressing for Success – Focused on professional appearance, self-confidence, and presentation.
- Session 4: Pitching – Taught effective communication and public speaking through interactive activities.

The sessions were co-led by Extension Agent Morgan Walker and Social Worker Shirley Alexander, who created a safe, supportive, and discussion-based environment. The program concluded with a graduation ceremony to celebrate participants' growth and achievements.

Summary

The Young Women's Empowerment Group was a structured, four- week intervention designed to support the personal and leadership development of middle school girls identified as at-risk in Beaumont, Texas. Facilitated by Extension Agent Morgan Walker and School Social Worker Shirley Alexander, the program engaged five participants in targeted workshops focused on goal setting, financial literacy, professional dress for success, and how to pitch. Delivered in a safe and supportive environment, the initiative aimed to enhance participants' self-efficacy, future orientation, and social-emotional competencies. The program concluded with a graduation ceremony recognizing individual growth and achievements. This pilot initiative demonstrates the potential for community-based, skills-focused mentorship programs to positively impact youth development outcomes in underserved populations.

Future Studies

- Expand the program to reach more participants across multiple schools in the Beaumont area.
- Implement pre- and post-program surveys to collect quantitative data on self-confidence, goal- setting ability, and leadership skills.
- Collect qualitative feedback through participant reflections, facilitator observations, and interviews with school staff.
- Introduce a follow-up or alumni component to support long-term development and track sustained impact.
- Explore the effectiveness of peer mentorship by involving past participants in program delivery.
- Use collected data to refine session content and tailor future programming to participant needs.

References

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