

I AM WE OFFERING C.A.K.E. PROGRAM DEVELOPING LEADERSHIP IN YOUNG WOMEN



I Am We founder & CEO Latisha Thomas (center) with C.a.k.e. program participants Keyosha, 11; Dana, 13; Isis, 11; Dyonna, 11; and Marrissa, 12.



Latisha Thomas, founder & CEO of I Am We, encourages Keyosha as she tells her story at the C.a.k.e. concluding ceremony in June. (Photo by Tanya Harris)

Successful women have set up shop in Austin Town Hall Cultural Center and they are making C.a.k.e. No, this isn't a cooking project; it is a leadership and communications development program for West Side girls ages 12-17 years old. Latisha Thomas is the founder and CEO of *I Am We*, the organization sponsoring the C.a.k.e. program. She describes C.a.k.e. as a visual arts and mass media program developing leadership and self-confidence in

girls through communication skills and the arts.

C.a.k.e. is an acronym for Communication, Accountability, Knowledge, and Effectiveness. Latisha describes C.a.k.e. and *I Am We* as a visual arts and mass media program with the goal of fostering leadership and cohesiveness amongst teen and pre-teen girls through art, mentorship, and social etiquette. *I Am We* is a non-profit organization operating in partnership with Goodeity.

I Am We was founded by anthropologists, educators, writers, and professionals. Its initial 6-week session was held at Austin Town Hall Cultural Center in May and June involving 20 girls meeting twice a week. A closing ceremony was held June 30 featuring four of the girls telling stories from their lives and experiences.

Latisha Thomas and *I Am We* are preparing to launch the next session of C.a.k.e. in October. She says the group plans to hold consecutive 6-week sessions in at least two locations with more than 100 girls participating between October and June. The girls will do art and photography projects as means of communicating, and will concentrate on developing writing and verbal skills for effective story-telling.

The four components of C.a.k.e. are vital for future success because effective communication skills help people better understand each other, build trust, and increase critical thinking. Young girls who are responsible, accountable, and able to make positive decisions in life are more likely to go on to success in college and life. When teenagers are knowledgeable, they are more confident, and make

better decisions for themselves and their communities.

Thomas notes that we live in an outcome-based society. Youth working toward goals become empowered leaders who are results-driven. Participants also hear from and meet successful, dynamic women in the program.

Girls interested in learning more about *I Am We* and enrolling in the C.a.k.e. fall program should call 312/291-1273 or email: info@iamwecommunity.org.



Dyonna tells her story at the concluding event for C.a.k.e. leadership development & communication program for young girls and teens meeting at Austin Town Hall Cultural Center. (Photo by Tanya Harris)



I Am We leaders with C.a.k.e. program participants Isis, Board Chair Paul Thomas, Keyosha, Dyonna, CEO Latisha Thomas, Marrissa, Board member Mary Bradley & Board member Pamela Murray. (Photo by Tanya Harris)