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A message from a Project Rebuild family

Contributed By: The 411 News

Twenty-one families complete truancy reduction program

Alice Leslie chose her words cautiously, describing the impact of Project Rebuild on her life. "My grandchild and daughter-in-law always correct me when I don't get my words right."

"I was angry because I was being a mother again and not a grandmother. I had 5 grandchildren in my house with 5 different attitudes. A grandmother is a person who brings grandchildren to the house, bakes the cookies, pops the popcorn and sends them home," Leslie said, warming up to her job to give words of encouragement. "When I came here I thought I knew it all. But this program here, taught me how to be a grandparent."



ROBBIE SMITH, LEFT-RIGHT, ALICE LESLIE, ALISCEA LESLIE, AND MEGAN BALLARD

What Leslie got out of Project Rebuild was seeing how tutoring improved academic performance, how resources were provided for families, the effects of positive attitudes and examples of building self-esteem.

Now in its 4th year, Project Rebuild's graduation ceremony Tuesday was for 21 families that had completed its truancy reduction program – 12 weeks of parenting education, family counseling, tutoring, incentives and sanctions designed to change the behavior that brought students and parents to the attention of the Gary City Truancy Court. "We recognize truancy is a symptom of problems in the family," said Judge Inga Shannon, developer of the program in collaboration with the Gary City Court, Gary Police Dept., and Lake County Prosecutor's Office.

Truancy begins showing up in middle school, at a critical time in a child's education. And it increases the chances that a student will be a high school dropout. Gary's middle school students are the focus of Project Rebuild. The Gary school district, including Roosevelt allows Project Rebuild to view students' attendance records. Families enter the program through an invitation from the truancy court.

"These people here," Leslie continued and pointed to program partners, but she stopped and started again. "This group of people sitting here, you need to give them a big round of applause," she said to the families and their friends filling every seat in the Gary Police station community room. "I used to come in here and talk about all the negatives. But now I'm bragging because I got 5 kids on the honor roll."

She was talking about Sandra Cotton and the Genesis Family Center that offers homework help, tutoring and life skills training. This partnership started in 2012, the first year of Project Rebuild. "We teach them decision making, self-esteem, how to get along and how to communicate with each other," Cotton said.

Leslie was also talking about the parenting education training provided by Laura Wynn and the Indiana Parenting Institute. Wynn reiterated the importance of communication – how improved social and interpersonal skills benefits parents' relationships with their children.

"Those communication skills serve another purpose for parents," Wynn said, "who are looking for jobs but don't have the skills for many of the jobs they apply for." IPI has a customer service training program that can prepare parents for work in that sector.

The newest Project Rebuild partner is the Geminus Corporation. Judge Shannon is in talks with Indiana's Family and Social Services Administration to expand the program into East Chicago and Hammond.

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