

## Workshop aims to advise, give kids a voice



Founder and CEO of Feed My Sheep Resource Center, Inc. Cheryl Smith, second from right, talks with participants in the recent Your Life Matters rally at Indiana University Northwest. Pictured, from left, are the Rev. Gwendolyn Sanders, Bonita Hawkins, Smith and Pastor Theresa Bibbs. (Sue Ellen Ross / Post-Tribune)

By **Sue Ellen Ross**  
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**G**athering mentors, educators and local speakers to present a variety of topics to students, parents and community members was the focus of the recent My Life Matters summer rally at Indiana University Northwest.

After a welcome session from the sponsoring organization Feed My Sheep in the Savannah Building, visitors divided into groups to attend breakout sessions in the Hawthorn building.

"We decided to have this event because every year in our communities violence spirals out of control, and we are constantly hearing about someone — our youth in particular — being killed, gunned down," Feed My Sheep founder and president Cheryl Smith said. "So, being dedicated to the pursuit of peace, we wanted to rally for L.I.F.E. — listen, inform, focus, engage. We invited young, seasoned alumni of local area high schools, along with community leaders, to spearhead the workshops and give their testimonies of how they overcame the exact issues our youth are facing, and confirm to them that they don't have to be a product of their environment, and success is inevitable."

The vision of Feed My Sheep is to "nurture the mind and feed the soul," she added.

"The mission of FMS is to be a vehicle that provides various initiatives to enhance social, and self-sufficiency skills for the underserved populations of all ages in Northwest Indiana and the surrounding areas," Smith said.

Several area donors and sponsors supported the recent rally at IUN.

Among those presenting during the workshop section of the day were Chicago attorney Teresa Gueyser, with a session called Know Your Rights, and Indiana Parenting Institute Executive Director Laura Wynn Smith, with Winning Kids & Winning Parents.

"We can, and should, teach our children to be cautious and aware, but not to always be afraid," Smith said.

Gueyser shared a personal experience that began with a traffic stop. She said she was treated in a way that didn't sit right with her. She was in the right and

wanted to stand up for herself, but realized that her goal was to get home to her family.

"You have rights, but you need to exercise them in the right way," she told her audience. "Stop, listen and recognize the situation. Understand what you want at that point in your life."

Sandra and Bob Mosley of Prime America advised being your own boss. They showed videos of an 11-year-old girl and an 18-year-old student who each found a niche and filled it, finding their way through self-employment. "Entrepreneurship is available at any age," Sandra Mosley said.

In the case of the young woman, the road to a new business began when she got stung by a bee and began researching them.

This led to her substituting honey for sugar in her grandmother's lemonade recipe, and her business took off.

The young man developed an iPhone app that allows students to retrieve pertinent information regarding their school system.

Smith said the takeaways for visitors of all ages at the event are numerous:

To educate youth and families on how to avoid a violent summer, to provide community members with resources and information they need to become safety advocates, and to make a positive impact that will unleash young people's potential to grow and flourish - and transform the way they live. "It's time for our community to become proactive in preventing violence in our neighborhoods, homes and schools by turning to alternative ways allowing for a peaceful and safe summer, and helping our youth live out their lives and reach their full potential and goals. We hope that they will leave believing they can achieve."

Although the Feed My Sheep organization realizes that it's going to take more than one rally to change the mindset of the community, they believe it is definitely a start.

As Orlando Grind, one of the facilitators said, "if we touch just one...we're good."

More information about Feed My Sheep is at 219-440-2465.

*Sue Ellen Ross is a freelance reporter for the Post-Tribune.*

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