

BREAKING UPDATE: Collapsed drainage pipe may be to blame for sinkhole on Sheffield in Dyer

https://www.nwitimes.com/news/local/northwest-indiana-students-encouraged-to-be-kings-queens-and-superheroes/article_2e25df3c-1898-5c23-9079-75fc8d6d121e.html

URGENT

Northwest Indiana students encouraged to be 'kings,' 'queens' and 'superheroes' at anti-violence conference

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Motivational speaker Jeremias Alicea speaks to students Friday during the 2018 Youth Violence and Drug Prevention Conference at Indiana University Northwest.

John J. Watkins, The Times



GARY — Muhibb Dyer dressed like a king, then wore a prison uniform, then donned a suit.

He was projecting the black experience: from rulers in

Boston pediatrician in Gary: Collaborate to prevent childhood trauma



How to solve the Region's opioid crisis? Conference tries to find out



'I don't want any kid to go through what I went through.' At child abuse forum in Gary, author speaks about how to overcome trauma.

Africa, to slaves, then inmates in America, to now presidents and business owners in that same country.

The Milwaukee motivational speaker gave his emotionally charged, animated presentation, "From Kings to Thugs to Presidents," before a group of several dozen Northwest Indiana middle- and high-school students Friday at the 2018 Youth Drug and Violence Prevention Conference at Indiana University Northwest.

"They keep telling us that all we are is thugs, hustlers and criminals," he said. "But we are an old people, we are an old culture and we go back thousands of years. Way before Lil' Wayne ever called himself a beast, we called ourselves kings and queens in Africa, who sat on thrones and governed big empires.

"Do you got a king in you?" he asked. "Because I got a king in me."

He encouraged students to avoid the street life that killed his godson, and instead go to school, come back to their community and open a business and hire friends and neighbors.

Friday's conference, the 11th annual, also featured breakout sessions on guns, gangs, bullying and suicide, among other topics. The event was themed "Guardians of the 219 Realm."

"To the young people, you are our superheroes," Gary Mayor Karen Freeman-Wilson said. "Let's protect the 219 realm."

Jena Bellezza, of the Indiana Parenting Institute, encouraged students to build healthy relationships and avoid toxic ones. She said people need to focus on their own strengths, and look for people who are loving and supportive.

"We get a lot of negative information about relationships," she said. "We're being taught things that keep us isolated, that keep us competitive ... that make us violent with each

other."

Bellezza said putting yourself out there can lead to valuable connections. She recalled talking to a man at a going-away party who was running for the state senate, forming a relationship that lasts to this day. That man, Eric Holcomb, is now the governor of Indiana.

Jeremias Alicea, a motivational speaker who is a lifelong resident of Northwest Indiana, talked about the importance of character, of making the use of one's talents, of staying away from negative influences.

"Use those gifts and talents that you've been blessed with, find out what it is and use it to make an impact in some way, shape or fashion," he said. "Your talent is great, but if you don't have the character to back up that talent, you can actually make some decisions that can cost you dearly."

And he told the kids to start chasing those dreams now.

"A year from now you will have wish you started today," he said. "Don't waste time."

Giles Bruce

Health reporter

Giles is the health reporter for The Times, covering the business of health care as well as consumer and public health. He previously wrote about health for the Lawrence (Kansas) Journal-World. He is a graduate of Northern Illinois University.