



Teen leads charge to battle dropout rates in York City

EYANA ADAH MCMILLAN *The York Dispatch*

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Ginia Moorehead, a senior at William Penn Senior High School, speaks at the YorkCounts meeting on Tuesday. (Bryant Hawkins Photo)

Ginia Moorehead failed ninth grade three times and dropped out of school twice.

Today, Ginia, 17, is a junior at William Penn Senior High School with a 3.6 grade point average.

In January, she started Teaching, Empowering and Encouraging the New generation (TEEN), a character-building program that urges girls ages 13 to 17 to graduate from high school and to make scholastic and career plans for their futures.

Barbara Leonard, a licensed social worker at the high school, helps Ginia with TEEN, which runs during the school year at the high school.

"Her energy is just contagious," Leonard said of Ginia. "She wants to help because, the issues they're struggling with, she's been there before."

Ginia said she wants to go to college so she can one day be a social worker at William Penn.

"At first, it used to be about what I was wearing and how I looked," she said. "Now, I'm focused on where I'm going and where I want to be."

Fighting truancy: The student told her story Tuesday to more than 50 people who attended the "Kids, Truancy and a County at Risk" meeting held at the high school by YorkCounts and United Way of York County.

The two organizations completed a "Stay in School" study and are working together to raise awareness of the county's truancy and dropout issues and to find ways to help school districts overcome them.

This is the second meeting YorkCounts and

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United Way held on the truancy issue. The first meeting was held in November at Dover Area High School.

At William Penn, United Way Executive Director Bob Woods reported that over a 10-year period, 6,400 students dropped out of school in the county, and that more than a third of William Penn seniors do not graduate.

He also announced that the United Way has received a \$50,000 AT&T High School Success Special Grant to help the agency develop a stay-in-school program for the York City School District. The program would involve parents, businesses and community organizations.

Seeking solutions: The audience also heard from York County Common Pleas Judge John Uhler, founder of the York County Truancy Task Force, who began talking about his concerns with truancy more than 10 years ago.

He urged school officials, legislators and community agencies to come up with programs addressing some of the real reasons for truancy, including problems at home and lack of parental concern for children's education.

City school board member Sandie Walker said families and community organizations can help keep students in the classroom by committing to consistent involvement in the district's efforts to overcome truancy and dropout issues.

However, Ginia spoke from her experience. She

said many students with dropout and truancy issues have been abused and often feel like no one in school cares about their traumatic situations.

"Get staff involved in the children's lives," she said. "Get to know them. I was a dropout, but now school is the number one priority."

After the meeting, Ginia explained that she focused on trying to look good because she wanted to be accepted in school to compensate for the hardships outside the classroom.

"I just want to help other girls who are going through the same thing," she said. "I want them to know that they can have a future for themselves."

-- Reach Eyana Adah McMillan at 505-5438 or emcmillan@yorkdispatch.com.

TEEN program

Stationery and monetary donations are being accepted for Teaching, Empowering and Encouraging the New generation (TEEN), a character-building program that urges girls ages 13 to 17 to graduate from high school and to make scholastic and career plans for their futures.

The program is run at William Penn Senior High School by founder Ginia Moorehead, a 17-year-old junior there. Barbara Leonard, a licensed social worker at the high school, helps Ginia with

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TEEN, which runs during the school year.

For more information, e-mail giniamoorehead@yahoo.com or teen.forteens@yahoo.com. Leonard can be reached at 849-1251 or bleonard@ahcsinc.com.

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