

Think like men, work like dogs, girls told

By JAN DEAN
Special

Almost 1,300 girls raised the roof with cheers, squeals and applause at the Living Arts Centre Tuesday as motivational speakers talked about self-esteem and achievement.

Created by Esteem Dream Corp. and presented by the Toronto YWCA, the Girl Event was the kick-off to a four-city tour across Canada next spring that tackles the self-esteem problems experienced by teen girls.

During the teen years when self-esteem is so tied to body changes and appearance, girls have an especially tough time. Low self-esteem can lead to alcohol and drug abuse, violence, suicide, teen pregnancy, eating disorders and poor academic performance.

Author and teen therapist Karyn Gordon told the girls self-esteem is not just a teen issue, it is a human issue.

"There are so many things we can't control," she said. "We can't choose our family or our feelings, but we can choose friends, books and TV shows and how we think"

Gordon brought the house down with her interactive Spill Your Guts Talk show skit and stories. At age 13 Gordon was told by a school counselor that her learning disability would mean she would never finish high school. She overcame her problems and earned a PHD.

Gordon said it takes work to develop healthy self-esteem, but it is achievable. She advised the girls to stop blaming others and playing the victim, set realistic goals and start seeking out people with healthy esteem.

Three-time Olympic gold medalist rower Marnie McBean believes it is an easier world today for young girls but

said, "It's important to show girls the possibilities. They need smart, active, kick-ass role models."

McBean was emphatic that, "I've done special things, but I don't think I'm special. That's why I've been talking to young girls and encouraging them for years."

The oldest girl to take the stage on Tuesday was Mayor Hazel McCallion who advised the girls to, "Think like a man, act like a lady, and work like a dog."

Sarah Varley of The Esteem Dream Corp. and co-creator of the Girl Event, said she and partner Jennifer Hilborn came up with the idea four years ago.

"We started it in Mississauga because when you want to attract school girls, you gotta go to the burbs, and the Living Arts Centre is a fantastic venue," said Varley.

The group already has corporate sponsors Zellers and Fashion 18 magazine, but are looking for a few more corporate and government sponsors before taking their show on the road this spring.

Amanda Dale, Director of Advocacy and Communications for the Toronto YWCA, said her 130-year-old organization jumped at the chance to be involved with the Girl Event.

"We're a Young Women's organization, and it's important to marshal the energy of young women," she said. "To do that, we can't be preachy or dowdy and this event makes us visible to young women in a positive way."

The girls came from more than 70 schools and from as far away as Petrolea.

The Grade 10 and 11 girls from Father Goetz Secondary School in Mississauga were enthusiastic about the experience.

Said one: "This helps show how to get along with other people. And that includes parents, even if they seem like they're from a different planet."