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Youth group honoree offers children advice

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LANSING | Youths should be more than just sympathetic bystanders, attorney Robert Harris told the crowd at the Reclaim A Youth banquet Friday at the Serbian Social Center.

"I want you to not only be aware of yourselves and those goals that you set for yourselves, but I want you to be aware of the world that you live in," Harris said. "I want you to remember that you're citizens of the world."

Harris, who received the Reclaim A Youth's 2005 humanitarian award, told the crowd to be sympathetic to the plight of others, including the many children starving as a result of war in the Sudan. He asked them to form an opinion on issues and to take an active role in politics by writing to their government representatives.

A graduate of the University of Illinois and the DePaul University School of Law, Harris became Cook County's first black public guardian in December. Harris represents the legal rights of thousands of neglected and abused children and disabled adults.

"In your good fortune, don't close your eyes and be complacent to what's happening around you," Harris told his young listeners.

"Remember to reach back to do something that was done for you. It takes one to make one."

Twenty-two young people were honored as the RAY of Hope recipients for outstanding scholastic achievement and public service.

Earlier this year, seven individuals were awarded one- or two-year scholarships.

Applications are sent to local schools and churches, and winners are determined by such criteria as grade point average, extracurricular activities and financial need.

Reclaim A Youth, a nonprofit volunteer organization based in Glenwood, was founded by Addie Mix and Gloria Randolph, two south suburban moms who lost sons who were away at college to violent deaths.

Rather than simply mourning the loss of their sons, Mix and Randolph decided to make a positive difference.

In August 1991, the two friends started Reclaim A Youth as a support group, but it grew into an outreach organization that supports youths through college scholarships and various enrichment programs.

Reclaim A Youth offers such services as grief and loss support, early intervention for at-risk youths and tutoring. Its focus is primarily on young people from Chicago's South Side and the south suburbs, regardless of race, creed or color.

In addition to awarding scholarships, RAY also provides recipients with a personal mentor to guide them.

"Any types of situations that occur during the year, they have someone from the organization that they can call and communicate with," said Evonne Blakey, chairperson of the college orientation program.

More information on Reclaim A Youth can be found at www.reclaimayouth.org.

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