*Daughters of the Collective Hosts Self-Esteem Workshop for Young African-American Girls*

*Daughter of the Collective (DOC) Research and Mentoring Program* is a student organization, run by undergraduate and graduate students at Michigan State University. Founded in 2006, *DOC members* mentors 6th-8th grade African-American girls in Detroit and exposes these young girls to a mix of educational, cultural, and artistic opportunities. As Dr. Denise Troutman, Advisor of *DOC*, so eloquently put it:

“This mentoring program is geared to ‘save’ young Black girls by anchoring them in positive teachings about language, culture, and identity, thus promoting liberatory education and countering negative images of Black females as oftentimes promulgated through popular culture.”

These negative portrayals often contribute to lower levels of self-esteem and self-confidence, especially during the impressionable middle school years. 6th-8th grade is a pivotal time in a young woman’s life. A girl’s self esteem begins to drop during adolescence, and with this in mind, *DOC* mentor Keondra Dixon, a human development and family studies major, suggested the idea of doing a self esteem and self confidence workshop for the girls through the platform of a fashion show.

*DOC* teamed up with a fellow student group MODE, a fashion and expression organization at Michigan State, and invited 6th-8th grade girls from Dixon Academy to come and take part. After some complications with transportation, five girls (usually there are twenty) were able to attend. However, because these were quiet girls, everything ended up working out.

“I think it was the best session we ever had,” remarked *DOC* mentor Sharonda Chaney, a social work major.

What made the fashion show unique was what the girls were modeling. Instead of modeling actual clothes, the girls had to make their outfits.

“They had to make clothes out of unconventional materials such as trash bags, newspapers, and paper plates. If you feel good about yourself you can make a trash bag look good,” explained Dixon enthusiastically.

The most rewarding part for the mentors was seeing the mentees, the ones whom are typically the shyest, come out of their shells and work the runway.

“One of the girls is really shy. When we did the runway walk, though, she was really a natural model. Her face just lit up when she was walking down the runway and strutting it and posing. Everyone in the room was shocked, including Dr. Troutman, because we’d never seen her in that element. We really brought her confidence out and I was like like ‘Yes, we’re doing what we’re supposed to do,’” said DOC mentor Jade Williams.

After talking to the mentors and Dr. Troutman about the fashion show and DOC, I can safely say each and every one woman is incredibly passionate and dedicated to helping these young girls become confident young women. They want these young girls to feel empowered and good in their own skin, even if it’s a little different than the norm. As Williams said:

“One of the things *DOC* does overall is that you don’t have to fit into the place society wants you to be. You can be whatever you want to be.”

If you’re interested in becoming a mentor like these dedicated women, email mentorsdoc@gmail.com with your inquiry. For more information on DOC, make sure to visit its website.