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## The Boston Globe

ROXBURY

### Girls following in their older sisters' footsteps

By Danielle Dreilinger, Globe Correspondent | March 26, 2006

The 11 professionals and 40 teenagers at the Tobin Community Center last Monday celebrated Women's History Month in real time: with the older generation giving the young women some inspiration and advice.

"It's emotional for me," said panelist Nurys Camargo, director of community relations at the Suffolk district attorney's office. She said she wished she'd had the opportunity to talk to successful women about their careers when she was growing up in Miami.

The girls shyly scuffed their chairs away from the speakers to sit near their friends, but remained rapt for well over an hour as different panelists repeated the same message: Determination, education, and networking will help you get somewhere.

Many teens attended as part of the Youth Leadership Program for Girls, a Robert F. Kennedy Children's Action Corps initiative that brings 20 city high schoolers together for community service and personal development projects several times a week during the school year.

Most of the girls are fairly strong students, according to Boston director Nichelle Sadler, and the program aims to keep them on course.

The panelists' personal stories, of bringing themselves up from tough beginnings and the twists and turns along the way, seemed to resonate the most.

"Twenty-five years ago, I was you," said Boston police detective Lisa Holmes, who grew up in the Orchard Park housing development. "I didn't know what I was gonna do, unless it involved the boys!" She eventually became the first African-American woman to serve in the homicide unit, and currently works in the sexual assault unit.

The teens particularly appreciated stories about attending college despite financial hardship. Adrienne Taylor, executive director of the Dorchester Family YMCA, drew laughs when she described her mother's plan to pay for college: Win the lottery. Taylor didn't count on that. She sent a loan form to her mother to sign, and took two jobs.

Julene Reid, a junior at O'Bryant High School in Roxbury, said she could relate to lawyer Nancy A. Newark, who also borrowed and worked her way through school. Like Newark, "I come from a family of four, and I'm the youngest," Reid said in an interview. "She's coming from the same place." Reid said she decided that "it's OK to not know where your [college] money is coming from" and to trust that between work and loans, you can do it.

Telling them it was necessary at times to overcome lingering racism and sexism, the professionals encouraged girls to make connections, beginning with the panelists

themselves. "Do not leave without getting their cards!" urged Camargo, telling them to "hustle." After the formal talk, each woman attracted a circle of motivated girls.

Fallon Holloway-Lewis, of Roxbury, said she got panelists' phone numbers. "In the future I might need their guidance."

Perhaps the biggest hit of the afternoon was someone only a few rungs up the career ladder. Two years ago, Niyah Asim left the Department of Youth Services after 16 months in a locked treatment center, and years of fighting, smoking pot, and getting kicked out of schools. Now she attends Bunker Hill Community College and interns at DYS. She advised the girls to surround themselves with a circle of friends who wanted to succeed.

"Focus on you," she said. "No one's gonna focus on you like you focus on yourself."