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STUDENTS TRANSFORM FROM STRANGERS TO FRIENDS AT WAYNE STATE'S GIANT STEP TEEN CONFERENCE



The Giant Step Teen Conference, Michigan's longest-running teen conference, recently gathered 289 students from across metro Detroit to learn how to respect differences and build friendships. For 31 years, Giant Step's free annual conference has helped students from a wide range of backgrounds get to know each other.

Ninth and tenth graders from urban, suburban, public, private, charter, parochial, magnet and even home schools attended the Oct. 28 event. This year, four deaf students and two interpreters attended from the Frederick Douglass Academy for Young Men.

Each student was assigned to a small discussion group with diversity across race, culture, religion, ethnicity and income.

"The students are wary at first. All those faces they don't know," said Cheryl Deep, media relations manager for Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute.

Trained facilitators guide open interactions on topics like bullying, friendship, disabilities, parents, self-image, career plans and conflict.

"Facilitators get everyone talking," Deep said. "By the afternoon, students are sharing cell phone numbers and email addresses. It's beautiful to behold."

Having healthy relationships was the keynote topic and focus of the simultaneous educators' seminar, which offered three continuing education credits to the professionals who bring the teens. The groups reunited for the final report out, in which a student from each table announced what they had learned.

Conference Coordinator Trudy Shiemke said the event is an excellent fit with Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute's mission to improve the welfare of children and their families. "Our motto is 'inclusion, harmony and acceptance,'" she said. "Young teens are willing to be open-minded. Getting to know someone you might not encounter in your everyday school or neighborhood can change attitudes for life."

Evaluations confirm that more than 90 percent of students who attend Giant Step are more likely to approach a teen who seems different from



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3:38 AM Nov 5

Danielle | Dark Legacy: Twisted but True

10:19 AM Nov 4

ag6887 | New OA Journal: Journal of Online Learning Research

10:08 AM Nov 4

ad1112 | Detroit Diesel Looking to Hire Mechanical and Electrical Engineering Students

5:02 AM Nov 4

them, find talking with teens from different backgrounds interesting and educational, and plan to stay in touch with students they met at the conference.

Giant Step is sponsored by the Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute, the Co-Ette Club of Detroit, the DTE Foundation and the Junior League of Detroit. For details, visit mpsi.wayne.edu.