

Skip-A-Long classes give parents insight

Thomas Geyer | Posted: Thursday, October 9, 2008

Michael and Mary Agok, who along with their four children immigrated to Rock Island four years ago from Sudan, come from a different parenting background.

So when the couple heard about a course being given by Skip-A-Long Child Development Services called "Effective Black Parenting," they jumped at the chance to take the 15-week course that ended Thursday in Rock Island.

"It's a very different approach to raising kids in the United States than in Africa," Michael Agok said. "There are a whole different set of influences on children and adults in the United States than in Africa."

For Mary Agok the course helped her in getting the children, who are ages 4, 7, 8 and 11, to clean their rooms, do their homework and respect other people. It also helped her parent without assistance from extended family, like she's used to in Sudan.

"I don't have anybody here," she said. "They're all in Africa."

Tammy Trice, one of the teachers, said 10 parents were involved in the program, the first of its kind in Rock Island. She said the weekly two-hour meetings focused on discipline, building relationships, self-esteem, African-American culture and the power of modeling and teaching.

The parents are both learning and teaching their kids five life goals, including the importance of a good education, getting a good job, the value of relationships, taking pride in themselves and helping the community.

Graduation for the parents and their children was held Thursday at the Martin Luther King Center, Rock Island.

Despite the name of the program, "Effective Black Parenting," other races were represented.

Lisa Chappell is raising three daughters, all bi-racial, ages 2, 7 and 10.

"I was leery at first because of the title," she said. But she quickly discovered the benefit of the program. She wants her children to learn about and be proud of their African-American heritage.

Chappell learned about positive reinforcement and building strong character in her children. "I want to instill in them the values they need to make good choices when they're older and I'm no longer able to look over their shoulders," she said.

The class was made possible by grants from The Doris and Victor Day Foundation and the Mel McKay Foundation. Supporters also include the Regional Office of Education, mental health consultant Sue Klingaman and the Home Child Care Network.