



Juvenile detention teens encouraged to turn lives around

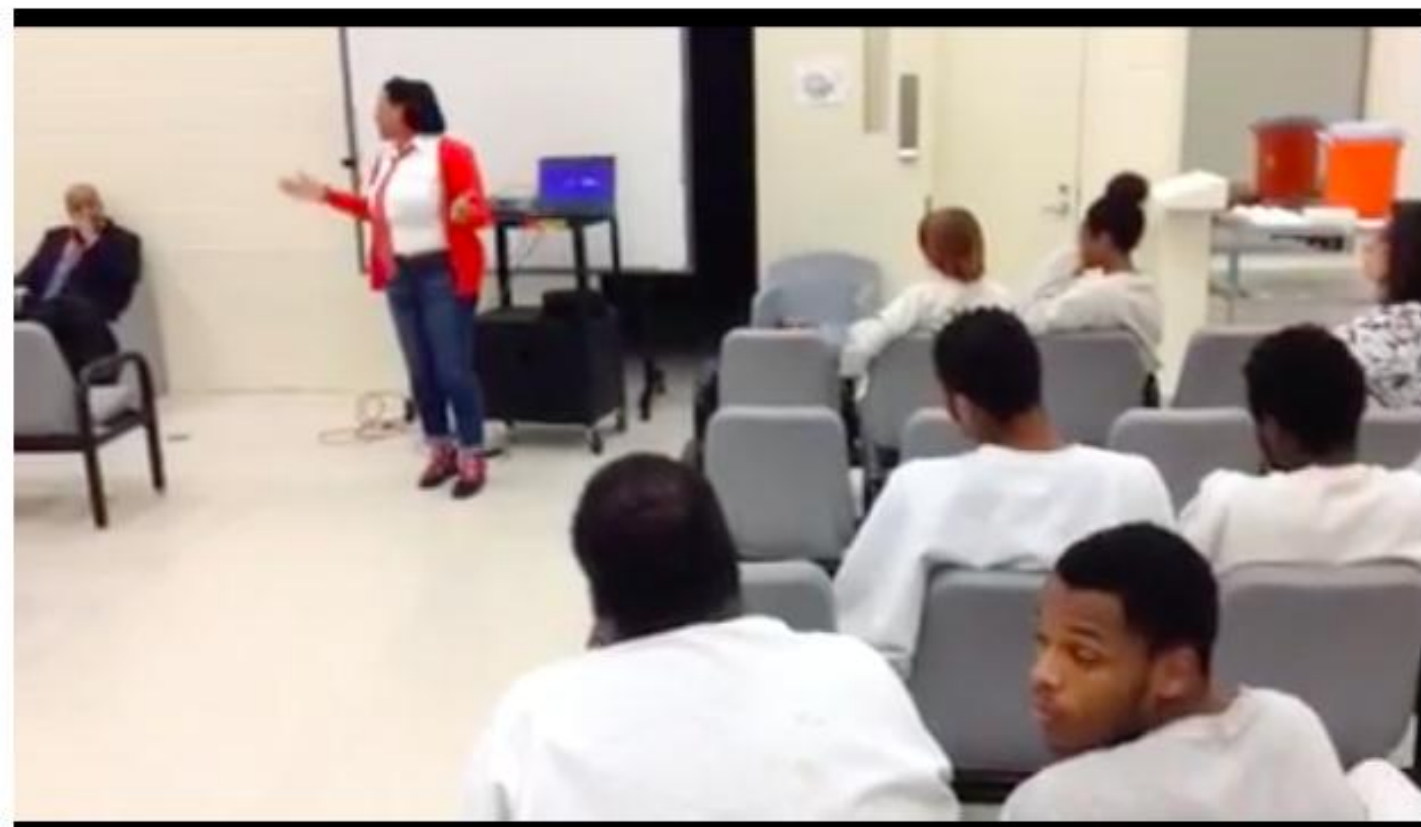
CROWN POINT — A group of motivational speakers Monday at the Lake County Juvenile Center made teens laugh, made them think and gave them hope.

Led by Dr. Michael McGee, the presenters talked to the detainees about life, experiences and encouraged the teens to make better decisions and to rethink their futures -- without violence, drugs and other abuse.

McGee, medical director of the emergency room at Methodist Hospitals, founded the nonprofit Project Outreach and Prevention on Teen Violence, or P.O.P.

McGee's goal is to bring awareness of preventing violence to teens. McGee said he is targeting teens in school and those confined to the juvenile detention center.

"I researched best practices, and we found a really good program in SAVE -- Students Against Violence Everywhere," he said.



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McGee said he began with a pep rally at Indiana University Northwest this fall with students from nine Gary schools and IUN. This is the second time he has visited teens confined to the Lake County juvenile center.

"We want to let kids know it's not cool to bully other kids and it's not cool to hit a girl," he said.

McGee and P.O.P. participants spoke about their lives. McGee told students he grew up in Gary and lived in several projects around the city.

"I used to like to fight," he told the teens.

While he always excelled academically, McGee told the teens he had a gun pointed at him on three occasions. As he got older, he began to realize the repercussions of his actions, and he turned his life around.

McGee talked to students about his experiences in the hospital, treating patients with gunshot wounds and stab wounds. He talked about the pitfalls of drug abuse and violence, and he talked about the issues of HIV infections.

"Never run from the police," McGee said. "Even if you are in the wrong, do not run from police; it can never have a good ending. You have a chance to change your life. You are in a juvenile center, not prison. Think before you do something.

"Get involved in programs. Think about conflict resolution. It's OK to apologize. Be cool about it. Never hit a girl. Dating violence is not acceptable," he said.

Some of those who spoke at the event were former CBS news reporter Pam Jones, retired Detroit police Officer Monica Evans and Brian Harvey, who talked about his life growing up in East Chicago and playing football.

Evans told the teens she grew up with a mother who made poor choices regarding the men in her life. Evans said she was sexually abused growing up.

"If you look at the trauma I had in my life, I really shouldn't be here today," she said. "There is power in the tongue."

Evans said she got through the trauma of her life through her faith in God.

Lake County Juvenile Judge Thomas Stefaniak Jr., who oversees the juvenile detention center, said this is the second time this group has come to the juvenile center.

"I received positive feedback from the kids the first time," he said.

"Dr. McGee and his group provide some real insight and living examples of how people can be successful after growing up in the area. It is encouraging to see the concern for our troubled youth that comes from within the community."

One Gary teen, whose name could not be released because he is a juvenile, said he knows he has to change his life and his attitude if he wants to be successful.

"Dr. McGee talked to us about STDs and what to do and what not to do. I can't blame my friends for what I did. I was in the wrong place at the wrong time," he said.