

IN THE NEWS

ROLE FOR THE FUTURE MENTORING PROGRAM GIVES HISPANIC TEENS A BOOST

Lucia Rios
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PRESS PHOTO/CORY OLSEN

Seeking advice: Obed Garcia, left, signs up for the mentoring program with Holland Police Officer Rod Mendoza Thursday evening at the Hispanic Educators, Leaders and Professionals (HELP) mentoring program event at East Middle School cafeteria. At center is Obed's mother, Cari.

Role for the future

MENTORING PROGRAM GIVES HISPANIC TEENS A BOOST

BY LUCIA RIOS
THE GRAND RAPIDS PRESS

HOLLAND — Gabriel Price wants to attend college and become an architect, but it wasn't until the start of eighth-grade that he first thought about furthering his education.

The 13-year-old East Middle School student heard about a new mentoring program geared toward eighth-grade Hispanic students and decided to check it out. Gabriel said the program could help him get better grades and learn helpful study habits.

Gabriel and 24 other eighth-graders from West and East middle schools will be part of the Hispanic Educators, Leaders and Professionals (HELP) mentoring program. HELP will give students guidance to reach their potential by providing information on life skills, career exploration, academic support, corporate tours, shadowing experiences and more. The program had a kick-off event Thursday evening at the East Middle School cafeteria, where students were introduced to their mentors.

Frank Coronado, of Holland, will mentor Gabriel for one year.

Coronado grew up in a migrant family, where his parents struggled to go through school while he and his siblings were young.

Sharing wisdom

Each mentor will meet his or her student twice a month at school during the lunch hour.

They will discuss:

- School and grades
- How to be successful in high school
- Future plans

Once a month, mentors and students will visit a college or company.

After watching his parents, Coronado knew the importance of education and graduated from Grand Rapids Community College and Grand Valley State University. He is a corporate relations manager at Davenport University, vice president of the West Michigan Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and a certified paralegal.

"Knowledge is worth nothing unless you pass it on," said Coronado. "I hope to instill in Gabe that he furthers his education, and I hope he can come back and be a mentor."

Noel Cuellar, president of Primera Plastics, is director of the HELP program. He established a scholarship program for Hispanic students but

found several recipients dropped out of college because they were missing skills during middle and high school.

Cuellar also came from a migrant family and moved to Holland when he was 6. Throughout his school years Cuellar didn't take education seriously and barely graduated from high school. It was when he was 33 that he started taking night classes at Grand Rapids Community College. Within five years, Cuellar had started his own injection molding plastics for automotive and office furniture in Zeeland.

"We're going to plant the seed and hopefully they will take off," Cuellar said. "I hope they will continue on with their education, but also that their peers will see more to life than fun and games."

Gabriel's mother, Amy Price, said she hopes HELP can give her son guidance and structure to build a strong foundation and through the process let him learn about his Hispanic background.

Price said the program is a blessing. Being a mother in general is a challenge, but as a single mother it's a struggle, she said.

"I think it's going to be great," she said. "I think this will point him in the right direction."

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