



**DOCTORS IN THE MAKING?** >The 2007 Hope For Tomorrow group toured Fairview Ridges Hospital to give the girls a feel for what type of medical careers are available.

# A Match Made in 'Hope'

A local mentoring program pairs successful women with teenage girls | BY SUSAN HEGARTY

**M**ost girls today don't have time to daydream about a fairy tale life where their prince rescues them from wicked stepsisters or a less-than-enchanting life.

Right here in Burnsville, there are girls struggling to rebuke taunts, sexual advances or invitations to engage in criminal activity. They might have to hurry home from school each day to care for younger siblings rather than building social and employment skills through after-school activities.

These girls don't need Prince Charming; they need opportunities like Hope For Tomorrow, a mentorship program that matches 14- to 16-year-old girls with a caring woman who is willing to share her own transformation from adolescent to successful,

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— RENAE PEREIRA, MENTOR

confident adult. The girls are nominated by the school counselors and principals, and participate on a voluntary basis. The program began in Bloomington in 1996 and was adapted in 2005 for Nicolle Junior High School in Burnsville. The program expanded to include Metcalf Junior High School.

"These are the ones that can sometimes fall through the cracks. They're not at high risk but it's a formative time," says Teresa Daly, a founding mentor and managing partner of Navigate Forward, an executive transition service.

The girls meet for three hours each month, October through May, with their mentors at their respective schools. Topics include peer pressure, healthy body image, first impressions, college and career options.

One popular component is a journal passed back and forth between each mentor and mentee. They can write about anything. Mentors write inspirational quotes, offer advice or share stories from their own teenage years.

"Journaling is a way for us to get a glimpse into their thoughts and what's going on in their

life,” says mentor Renae Pereira of the Dakota County Workforce Services. “It’s another chance to bond and an outlet for the girls. They know they can do it in private.”

The mentors and mentees take two field trips each year: one to a college and one to a business. Nicollet Mentee Allie Henderson, 15, was surprised by what she saw in this year’s workplace visit to the Best Buy corporate campus. “I didn’t know that working could be fun,” she says.

Prior to becoming involved in the program, Hodan Jama, 15, of Burnsville hadn’t given college a thought. Now, she dreams of becoming a doctor and opening a school in her native Africa.

Pereira has been a mentor for the past two years. “It’s just such a rewarding experience,” she says. Pereira has two high school-age sons but says the challenges facing girls are

different: “It’s important for them to build self confidence to stay strong in their beliefs and morals.”

Darlene Miller, a founding mentor and president of Permac Industries in Burnsville, is now working to organize a boy’s chapter with male mentors and an electronic version of the program to share with other schools. Plus, she’s starting a Hope For Tomorrow Web site and helping expand the program to White Bear Lake and Eden Prairie. “I truly love this program,” Miller says.

After a recent field trip, the girls and their mentors were asked: If you could do anything in the world and money was no object, what would it be? For Miller, the answer was easy. “I’d go around the world setting up Hope For Tomorrow.”

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Susan Hegarty is a freelance writer for *Burnsville Magazine*.



**BEAUTIFUL BELLIES** > At the last Hope for Tomorrow session of the school year in 2008, the girls (and mentors) got a belly dancing lesson.

### Helping 'Hope'

If you or someone you know might be interested in getting involved with Hope For Tomorrow, contact Darlene Miller at 952.746.0280 or [dmiller@permacindustries.com](mailto:dmiller@permacindustries.com).