

# Runway for Respect

Katie Sears

## **Background:**

**Katie Sears was the first Student Associate member of the Anne Arundel County Commission for Women. As such, Ms. Sears had full rights and responsibilities with the exception of chairing a committee of the organization. Additionally, Ms. Sear was given the task of creating, developing, and leading a project that fit within the goals and objectives of the organization, with the full support of the remaining members. What follows is Katie Sears' account of the inception, purpose, and details of her project, Runway for Respect.**

During my years as a student at Annapolis High School, I became concerned about how some of the other girls dress. In walking around my school, I have been amazed by how much sex-appeal they seem to be trying to convey through their wardrobe. Indeed, boys have responded to these girls in sexual manner. Also, I have become fed up with the disrespect for women that music and television presents. I think these media have an impact on my school mates. Consequently, I decided to do something to address this issue. I knew I had to start with the girls themselves and I had to do it with a younger age group in order to encourage them as soon as possible to develop into self-respecting young women. After the forum on Family Safety, held by the Commission for Women, I was inspired to think of a way to address what I was seeing in my school. My mentor in the Commission for Women, Tonja McCoy, and the other members supported me in the creation of *Runway for Respect*.

This project was unique because instead of lecturing, I was able to think of a way to present situations that would allow an audience of girls to draw their own inferences about tasteful dress and behavior through a fashion show. The fashion show targeted freshman girls at Annapolis High School and dealt with the issues of self-respect and self-image. The show depicted the “do’s and don’ts” of fashionable job interview attire, formal attire, and casual attire, modeled by four fellow upperclassmen girls: Ali Brandenburg, Noa Davidson, Keva Smith, and Kristina Stylianou.

“Runway” incorporated short skits. In this way, my friends and I were able to communicate a message while also entertaining the audience. The message was: The respect a woman gives herself determines the amount of respect she will receive, especially from men and also in the working world from everyone. I wanted the audience to see that a “classy woman”—one who models self-confidence and self-respect—is by far more successful and attractive than a promiscuous girl. I feel very strongly about this issue and I feel this project did a great job of addressing it.

This event occurred on Monday, February 9, 2009 in the Annapolis High School auditorium. In addition to the fashion show, there was a keynote speaker. Ms. Julie Lincoln, the Fitness & Wellness Director from the Big Vanilla Athletic Club, spoke to the girls about health and nutrition. She taught the girls about the reality of eating disorders and the importance of fitness. Ms. Lincoln invited questions and comments. Many of the girls were engaged by her speech which also included learning how the media kind of dictates what is “hot” and that the messages are often false and distorted views of what is more important; safety and security and self-confidence.

Many sponsors and individuals were involved to implement this project including the following: Amethyst Technologies, LLC, Edwin Hall, Michael Svec, Anne Arundel Community College, Anne Arundel County Public Schools, Big Vanilla Athletic Club, Cobblestone Concepts Corporation, Eccentric’s-The Spa Sanctuary-Lisa Ennis, Fashion Bug, Mary Kay Independent Sales Director-Betsy Richmond & Stephanie Layden, Partners In Care-Upscale Resale Boutique, and Target. Most of these contributors donated materials for the fashion show and for prizes for the all- girl audience.

Runway for Respect received publicity from the Anne Arundel County Public Schools Television and the County Executive’s Office. Jeanne Cooper, Chair of the Anne Arundel County Commission for Women and I were interviewed about the project’s anticipated impact. The Capital Gazette newspaper also featured an article and pictures that were taken the day of the fashion show.

Runway for Respect has potential to grow and to reach other schools and audiences. I would like for it to address different issues that may come up with the future. In fact, an administrator from Annapolis High expressed a desire to carry out a similar event that targets the boys. A fashion show for boys, designed to teach them how to respect girls and how to present themselves as gentlemen would be good. Therefore, I hope this project can be expanded on a larger scale, perhaps with bigger names involved.

The opportunity to make a difference in my local school through “Runway for Respect” under the guidance of the Anne Arundel Commission for Women as the Student Associate, has given me valuable experience. Through the Commission, I was able to address something I believed in: Helping other girls to see their true beauty.

Footnote: Katie Sears graduated from Annapolis High School in May 2009. In the fall, she entered (name of college) in Richmond, Virginia.