

'She Loves Me'

Program teaching girls how to take care of their bodies



Several participants of a creative arts program, along with instructor Aziza Shabazz, form a circle while taking part in an exercise about relaxation techniques during the program Tuesday at Pearl B. Larsen Elementary School.

Kristin Duncan

STEPHANIE HANLON

ST. CROIX — To build self-esteem and encourage self-awareness, fifth and sixth grade girls at Pearl B. Elementary School have been participating in a bi-weekly creative arts experience called "She Loves Me," for the past eight weeks.

Lead by energetic therapist Aziza Shabazz, the girls learn about how to take care of their bodies and the importance of maintaining a healthy body.

They start their sessions with a creative movement segment. Using local calypso and soca music the girls perform a non-impact aerobic (NIA) exercise. There is focus on breathing, stretching and reflexology. Shabazz is a certified NIA instructor.

"Exercise is really important for self-esteem," said Shabazz. The program also includes a body-mapping segment where the girls trace their body outlines and fill it in with inner expressions. This exercise is supposed to encourage them to think about how they feel about themselves. "The body has different emotions attached to it," said Shabazz.

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St. Croix Alois

WEDNESDAY, MAY 28, 2008, NO. 122



USVI 164th YEAR



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There are multiple exercises that focus on hygiene and body care. Shabazz teaches the girls about healthy eating and the importance of nutrition. She also shows them how to take care of their hands and feet. It is meant to show them how their outer appearance can affect their inner feelings.

"It's a way for your feelings to be expressed. It's a way to put them out there and let go of them," said Shabazz.

Throughout the program Shabazz encourages the girls to become fulfilled through themselves and their friends rather than through negative behavior.

"My favorite part about it is the dancing because when you dance you have self-confidence," said fifth grader Simone Fontenelle.

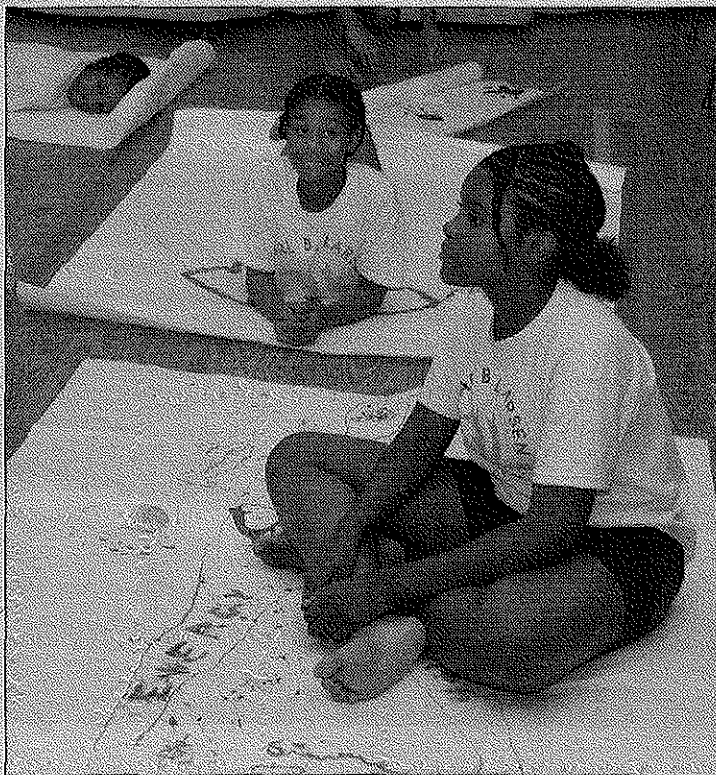
"I express my feelings, it makes me feel more confident in myself," said fifth grader La'Kiah Meade.

Bria James, a fifth grader, said she enjoys learning how to give massages. She said it makes her feel good about herself.

About 30 girls have participated voluntarily in the program.

"When you work with girls at a young age it allows them to have a vision for the future," said Shabazz.

She said she is trying to



Kristin Duncan
Participants of a creative arts program sit on and near their body maps during the program Tuesday at Pearl B. Larsen Elementary School.

show the girls that life doesn't have to be so hard and heavy, and the girls can make themselves happy. In the last eight weeks, Shabazz said the girls have explored a lot of emotional issues and she has shown them positive ways to deal with situations and feelings.

"I hope I can do much more of this," said Shabazz. "I'm so excited about it because it might help these girls."

The program was made possible by a grant that Virgin Islands Perinatal Incorporated received from the Ford Foundation. VIPI offered this it through their Women of Color Living in the Virgin Islands: Path to Health Justice Initiative.

For more information on the program, call Aziyza Shabazz at 771-0399 or e-mail at aziyzas@yahoo.com.