

A Home Full of GRACE

by Barbie Bassett

If you had the chance to dine with prominent women working in such careers as law, medicine, sales and other professions, what type of questions would you ask them? Take a peek inside the McRae Home and listen to some of the conversations going on among the teenage girls and volunteers with the Junior League of Jackson. Chances are you will hear questions like, "How did you know what you wanted to do for your career when you were my age? How did you select a college? Can I really be anything I want to be even though I'm a single mother?" With each dinner conversation, you are sure to hear words of encouragement and enlightenment coming from JLJ volunteers.

GRACE, Girls Rule! Accepting, Caring, Empowering, provides bi-monthly activities for girls ages 12-18 at the Methodist Children's Home. GRACE fosters self-esteem and independence in the teenage residents.

Quality time together during a meal often led to ponderings on relevant topics. "After we ate dinner with the girls, we usually had a speaker or designed a program to teach these girls life skills," said JLJ volunteer Heather Bergold. Although the participants enjoyed fellowship with the volunteers, they also took field trips designed to get them out of their element and had group discussions on life issues. "Some of these girls are one or two years away from being on

their own," Bergold said. "And some of them even have children already."

Project volunteer Florence Fraser had the opportunity to witness the excitement the girls had when they visited Easely Amused in Ridgeland. "Each girl took such pride in her own art creation," Fraser said. "These girls look forward to us sharing some time with them." As a token of appreciation, the girls had their art work printed on cards. Each volunteer was presented with a full set of their newly created masterpieces.

Project volunteer and OB-GYN nurse practitioner Liz White had an opportunity to talk to the girls about sexually transmitted diseases. "It isn't always discussed openly in schools,

Grace House participants create beautiful works of art.



The girls visit Easely Amused in Ridgeland.

and these girls don't have family members around to teach them," White said. "Being honest with them was a tangible way for me to show love to these girls and have them confide in me to help them with their personal problems."

Becky Mercier is a Sustaining member of JLJ who also works at the Methodist Children's Homes. She sees the impact the JLJ has on the girls through GRACE. "This project serves as a catalyst for our other volunteer groups," Mercier said. "Because of JLJ, we know a group of volunteers is more effective than just one person."

Kelly Scrivner chose this project to volunteer with careful thought. She wanted to know she was making a difference with her time. "One of the girls gave me a card with 'I love you' written on it," Scrivner said. "When the girls run up to hug you and want to know when you'll be back, you know you've made the right choice in project selection."

Mercier spent most of her Active

JLJ years in Fund Development or in-League placements. She always heard about the projects being performed in the community by JLJ, but GRACE has given her a new perspective on the work the League does. "Being on the receiving end of a project is phenomenal," she said.

Just ask the participants: "I think it is good these women care enough to take time out of their busy life to come see us," Briana said. "I've met ladies who have helped me deal with the things I'm going through," Morgan said. "I have changed from thinking I couldn't do things to thinking I can," said Starr. "I do things without hesitating now!"

Through the GRACE project, JLJ members embrace the League's mission of developing the potential of women. Mentoring, loving guidance and encouragement from JLJ volunteers puts these teens on the path to success. Simply put, "We are showing girls how to be women," said Project Chair Susanna Silvia.

Community Partner
Methodist Children's Homes,
McRae Home

Volunteers
Susanna Silvia, Chair
Amberly Collins, Co-Chair
Heather Bergold
Maggie Cravey
English DeVoss
Florence Fraser
Claire Hawkins
Carolyn Heard
Mary Kelly
Shelly Kilpatrick
Laura Lacoste
Melanie Love
Neely Lowery
Lesley Miller
Karla Ray
Kelly Scrivner
Rebecca Tackett
Liz White