

Higher Learning camp teaches students about environment, health, service



DAVE MUNCH/STAFF PHOTO

Higher learning

Higher Learning camper Cashannah Costley, left, picks cherry tomatoes with Jenny Graybill at the Human Services Program of Carroll County garden in Westminster Tuesday.

About Higher Learning, Inc.

Higher Learning, Inc., is an independent nonprofit that serves youth ages 11-17 in the Maryland area, particularly those in Carroll County where the program is located and Baltimore city where it supports at risk youth in Baltimore who are part of the Maryland Juvenile Justice system. It emphasizes the needs and experiences of students of color, according to its website.

It was founded by Roxanna Harlow, Ph.D. in sociology, who was Associate Professor of Sociology at McDaniel College before starting Higher Learning. She is responsible for the development, administration, and implementation of Higher Learning's active learning enrichment program. Harlow started it because there was a need in Carroll County for out-of-school academic activities, especially for students who can't afford expensive or private academic programs, she said. The nonprofit's programs work to develop critical thinking and broaden experiences for students.

www.higherlearning-inc.org

Posted: Wednesday, July 18, 2012 12:00 am | Updated: 12:22 am, Wed Jul 18, 2012.

Higher Learning camp teaches students about environment, health, service

By Alisha George Times Staff Writer

With temperatures in the mid-90s and the hot afternoon sun beating down on them, many county students in the Higher Learning camp enthusiastically weeded and picked vegetables from a community garden Tuesday.

Many joked with each other as they worked to spruce up the garden. Those picking vegetables asked questions and listened to how the food could be prepared into a healthy and tasty meal.

The activity was part of a community service lesson during Higher Learning's four-week summer camp, which exposes local students to the connection between the environment, sustainable living, food, health and wellness as part of its theme this year. The students were taught about the garden Tuesday and the need to provide healthy foods to low income members of the community.

Higher Learning, Inc., is a nonprofit that provides educational experiences, beyond standard school curriculum, for middle and high school students in Carroll County. The summer camp has been going on for four years.

Jenny Graybill, Opportunity WORKS program coordinator at Human Services Programs of Carroll County, talked about what was growing in the plot of land and the work of HSP. The garden, which was planted in May, is located behind West Middle and William Winchester Elementary schools and to the side of Dutterer Family Park.

The Human Services Programs is committed to improving the quality of life and self-sufficiency of at-risk and low-income Carroll County residents by providing assistance with basic needs, advocacy, linkages to resources and opportunities to enhance life skills, according to its website.

With her guidance, the students picked tomatoes, peppers, and herbs such as rosemary, parsley and dill, which will largely go to needy people and local soup kitchens and shelters, Graybill said.

Mischka Johnson, a rising sophomore at Westminster High School, said it was a hot day to work outdoors, but the activity teaches a beneficial lesson.

"I think this is to show us the importance of helping the community," she said. "And about building character."

The camp has exposed her to many new and different experiences, such as making butter from scratch and going to a vegan restaurant.

"Now I'm actually thinking about becoming vegan," she said.

This year's camp had a curricular theme of food, fitness and the environment, according to Roxanna Harlow, Founder and Executive Director of Higher Learning, Inc.

"It's really about learning to keep our planet alive, our bodies alive and our minds alive," she said.

Different guest instructors taught campers about how to stay fit, even without joining a gym, and explored yoga and the healing arts. The students talked to a nutritionist, made their own healthy meals, and traveled to a farm to learn about food production, to name a few activities, Harlow said.

"It provides them with the educational experiences they don't get in the regular curriculum," she said. "The more you know, the easier it is to learn more things."

Some students from the summer's first session, which ends Friday, will attend the second session, which runs from July 24 to August 10. Ten high school students will travel to Nicaragua for a portion of that time and learn how people in that country, especially teens, are effecting positive change in their communities. Expenses are paid for primarily through grants and individual and group sponsors.

"The point is for them to understand how social challenges can be similar no matter what part of the world you are in," Harlow said.

Students such as Cashannah Costley, a West Middle School rising eighth-grader, learned about recycling and growing her own food during the current summer session.

"I learned that strawberries are very good when you grow them yourself," she said. "I'm going to try to grow some strawberries next year."

Guy-Roger Mbongue, a rising freshman at Winters Mill High School, said he has enjoyed learning about health and fitness, especially about how the environment can influence personal health.

"It's good to stay healthy, you might live longer," he said.

Johnson said she believes the camp has taught her many useful life lessons. She has done her best not to miss a day of camp because she enjoys it so much.

"If you miss a day, then you're missing a lot you can learn," she said.