

On Saturday, Sept 8, 2018, Devon, Laura, and nine Trinity youth traveled to First Lutheran Church in Columbia Heights, MN to take part in a daylong Peer Ministry Leadership training.

The basic premise of the training was to understand the power of showing up for people and to learn skills for how to be there for our peers when they are new, hurting, or alone. After a brief ice breaker, we were asked to introduce ourselves to someone in the room we didn't know. In the debrief everyone said the experience was awkward. Then we were introduced to WHEAT, a framework for meeting people and making friends. WHEAT is an acronym:

W: Where (are you from?)

H: Hobbies (What do you like to do in your free time?)

E: Events (What events have you been to recently?)

A: Acquaintances (Do we know any of the same people?)

T: Travel (Have you traveled anywhere recently? Where is one place you would really like to visit?)

After learning WHEAT, we were asked to again go meet someone new in the room. This time, the experience was much more positive for everyone because we had a strategy. Many people only used one or two prompts before similarities were found and the conversations could proceed more organically. We practiced "WHEATing" several more individuals.

Next we played another ice breaker called "Detective, Murderer." That is what's going on in a few of the pictures I attached. It was fun!

One portion of the day was spent talking over the Biblical Story *The Good Samaritan*. We were asked to form groups and create skits of modern day Good Samaritan stories with reinterpretations of all five characters. This was the kids' favorite part of the training. Unfortunately, adults were not able to opt out of participating and thus Evie Wiant has video footage of me as 8th grade mean girl bullying sixth grade new girl. In that skit, I was the robber and Evie was the priest, a bystander who filmed the encounter.

Before lunch we were asked to select a picture out of many set out on a table. The picture was supposed to remind us of a time we felt alone or excluded. We then met with a couple individuals we hadn't talked to yet and shared our picture and corresponding experience. Afterward we talked about the experience and a few brave souls shared with the entire group.

After lunch, we used a large bin of balloons to label struggles we or someone we know are going through. We went around in a big circle where each person had the opportunity to name a struggle. The volunteer scribe wrote that struggle on a balloon and handed it to the volunteer balloon holder. I think the balloon holder got to about nine or ten balloons before he couldn't hold anymore. The kids named struggles such as divorce, eating disorders, death, suicide, illness, depression, and bullying.

We then went back to the picture activity, only this time we were asked to choose a photo that reminded us of a good time in our life. Two kids volunteered to be in the "fish bowl" and the rest of us watched them exchange stories with one another. The spectators were asked to comment on what the listener was doing that made him a good listener. We talked about empathetic listening and went off to practice telling our own stories in groups of three. Group members took turns being the story teller, listener, and person who evaluated the listener and told him or her what he or she did well.

Then new groups of three were sent to share personal stories of hurt. Groups were allowed to go anywhere in the building. When we all returned after 15 to 20 minutes about a third of the room was crying. It was a very powerful exercise for many participants and was a good reminder to me that 11 to 14 year olds can have real troubles. (Note: None of our kids shed any tears and members of some groups had clearly known each other well for some time.)

Toward the end of the day, we were taught how to evaluate a problem or troubling news a friend might bring to you. We learned the importance of considering our own filters before we react, knowing when it's time to tell an adult, and identifying which adult that might be.

Finally, we were able to meet with our own church groups and discuss how we can deploy what we learned at Trinity, in school, and at home. Our group had some extra time, so we played several games of Categories with a balloon, which was super fun.

Our youth fully participated in everything, which in many cases took a lot of courage, and maintained positive attitudes throughout. Devon and I feel very lucky to have gotten to spend the day with such a great group of young people.