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## Kids get lessons in ethics, leadership

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By **MARISSA AMONI** For The Beacon News

Sometimes leadership means working together. That is exactly what 29 middle school students did when they descended on Wayside Cross Ministries in downtown Aurora on Friday.

As part of the first Aurora Leadership Institute summer camp, students from all around Aurora spent the morning practicing group skills.

"We should partner up," said one student as she sorted through donated food in Wayside's basement storage room at 215 E. New York St.

Another group sifted through clothing on the second floor of the Wayside warehouse, and a third organized boxes of Thanksgiving decorations upstairs from The Hope Chest, Wayside's resale shop just above the hill at 36 N. Lincoln Ave.

"I couldn't be happier with how this has worked out," said Jim Bondi, chief of security at IMSA. "It is much better than I could have possibly thought."

Bondi started the camp at the Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy as a way to get 30 young people started on a lifelong course of making ethical decisions.

"The kids have definitely shown some leadership potential," said Jamie Gartland, a Kane County deputy sheriff. Gartland is one of a handful of school resource officers who spent the week as camp leaders. He said the camp succeeded in getting some of the students "out of their shell."

The week's curriculum covered such topics as communication, relationships and decision-making through various team-building exercises and games. Guest speakers included IMSA alumnus Cpt. Kenny Ruffin, now an Air Force fighter pilot in Japan.

"(The guest speakers) teach us a lot of things and it's not just in a classroom setting," said Itzel Lopez, 14, who will be a freshman at West Aurora High School. "We go out and apply what we are learning."

Before starting their service day at Wayside, they learned about Wayside's Hope Outreach Ministry and heard from recent men's program graduate Mark Brown, 52, formerly of Naperville.

Brown, a recovering alcoholic, drilled home the stark reality of making poor decisions. His wife died of alcoholism and he was headed down the same path. It wasn't until he got a DUI, spent three weeks in jail and lost his job that he found help.

"In life, we will suffer," Brown said. "We don't always get what we want."

Brown said he had a good life, but he was missing the strong faith in God before he hit bottom.

Brown then took a group of students to show them their service job for the day. The students quickly joined in on the daily duties that several men, similar to Brown, perform every day at Wayside.

All of the students who participated in the summer camp will turn in community service project proposals in the fall. The first-place winner will receive \$1,000 to get the winning project going. A second-place winner will receive \$500.

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