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Miami-Dade PD's Summer Scholars introduces kids to the justice system

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Enthusiastic support poured in from the legal community and the number of children grew from eight to 22, when the Miami-Dade Public Defender's Summer Scholars program gathered again for the sixth year.

The purpose is to introduce children to the justice system and spotlight potential careers.

Partnering with Educate Tomorrow, a nonprofit that provides a holistic program designed to meet the educational, independent living, developmental, and job placement needs of foster youth, PD-11 also worked with Florida International University for mentoring at-risk students in Miami's inner city.

"We went heavy on the mock trial boot camp, interspersed with fantastic speakers," said Mayra Peña Lindsay, special projects coordinator for PD-11.

Among the motivational speakers were Sen. Rene Garcia, R-Hialeah, and Rep. Kionne McGhee, D-Cutler Bay (see story page 6), who shared their moving personal stories. Marcus Bach-Armas, director of legal and government affairs for the Miami Dolphins, brought along some football helmets and talked about the financial side of improving the football facility.

Two Navy Seals discussed goal-setting, endurance, and good habits. And there were lessons about mindfulness and art therapy.

"We are thrilled with the support from large law firms such as Akerman, Hogan Lovells, and Stearns Weaver," said 11th Circuit Public Defender Carlos Martinez. "They elevated the summer program to a new level that goes beyond pro bono hours. This collaboration demonstrates an extensive commitment of the Miami-Dade legal community to uplift under-served and under-resourced children."

The mock trial was hosted by Stearns Weaver, with the following firm lawyers making brief comments: Eugene Stearns, Jennifer Stearns Buttrick, Rick Schatz, Matthew Dates, and Rene Ruiz.

Eleventh Circuit Judges Richard Hersch and Daryl Trawick fielded questions, and Judge Michael Hanzman presided over the mock trial.

Boot camp volunteer instructors included Zachary James, of Meland Budwick, P.A.; Daniel Lazaro, of Gaebe Mullen Antonelli & Dimatteo; Alvin Lindsay and Andrej Micovic of Hogan Lovells; Anthony Natale, supervisory assistant federal public defender; and Whitney Untied, of Akerman.

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