

SECTION E
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Seattle's neighborhoods, downtown and the region



Richard S. Heyza / Seattle Times
Richard Bash with his children: Zeearto, 10, Jacob, 5, and Holliday, 8. Bash says a program aimed at improving the parenting skills of blacks has helped restore his confidence.

Program helps blacks hone parenting skills

by Ron Fitten
Times staff reporter

Richard Bash was a desperate man.

The single parent, black father of three — one girl and two boys — was worried about his family disintegrating. He didn't know where to turn.

Neither did Rachael Clark, a black, single mother who wondered if she'd failed as a parent when she was told her son might be held back in school.

The concerns of Bash, Clark and 76 other parents of black children prompted them to seek better parental skills. They turned to the Central Youth and Family Services Effective Black Parenting Program.

The 15-week parenting class, offered by the Seattle-based, non-profit agency, was specifically designed to provide parenting tools for parents of black children.

"We wanted this program to assist parents... in the cultural and social nurturing of black children," said Pat Mouton, who

'There are cultural and social differences that I was not even aware of until I joined the program.'

Richard Bash

is black and is the program's coordinator. "The program was meant to help parents feel more confident."

Bash concedes he'd lost virtually all of his parental confidence before entering the program.

"I was not parenting effectively," Bash said. "I must admit that I was overwhelmed with the responsibilities and the workload. But I'm not overwhelmed anymore."

The program, Bash said, taught him "to appeal to my

child's mind and not his behind. He added that the program also showed him how to identify his children's specific behaviors problems, isolate that behavior from his own feelings, and redirect his children's behavior into something positive and instructive.

Bash also learned to understand some historical problems associated with black parents.

"There are cultural and social differences that I was not even aware of until I joined the program," he said.

During slavery, for example, there was "a need to instill fear into black children, Bash said.

"They (parents) thought it was better to put fear in them at home, so they wouldn't go out and get killed by the white power structure — the slaveholders," he said. "The children had to be fearful because social condition demanded that they be fearful. I was a tool parents used as protection for the children."

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Blacks learn how to become more effective parents

PARENTS

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Often whipping — or even beating — a child was the way some parents achieved their aim.

But the program, Bash said, taught him that was no longer necessary. Positive instruction, he learned, was a healthy way of raising children.

Mouton said the Effective Black Parenting Program — one of several in King County — resulted from a statewide task force mandated in 1989 to examine parental education as a way to curb family disintegration. The task force initiated a

"needs assessment" for each county across the state and determined that targeting specific cultural and social groups might help strengthen family units.

"The task force found that because there weren't any specific parenting classes that talked about the history of blacks, racism and slavery, and how it affected the black family unit, it might be smart to start some around the state," Mouton said.

After examining several culturally targeted, parental programs across the nation, the task force adopted the Effective Black Parenting Program as its model.

The program was conceived by California educator Dr. Kerby Alvy, who is white, and created and developed by black profes-

sionals, said Mouton.

"One of the things this program does is help families develop healthy black" identities, Mouton said.

Two weeks ago, the 78 parents of black children in King County were among the largest group to graduate from the Effective Black Parenting Program.

Clark was among them.

"I learned things from the class that I really needed to know," Clark said. "A lot of us didn't always get the structure from our parents, so we're trying to break out of that parenting cycle into one that will allow us to help our children meet their goals."

Abbie Jackson, a foster mother, said the program "was very

enriching" for her. "A lot of the children I'm dealing with are coming out of hell," she said.

"They need very specific teaching and parenting tools to enhance their lives. I believe in my ability, but I needed reaffirmation of my skills and reassurance that the things I was doing were correct. I learned a lot."

Bash said he came to realize that "instilling fear is not necessary. It is counter to effective parenting. It may have worked — and probably did work during slavery and Jim Crow — but that's not effective parenting.

"We can control children with fear — with spankings and whippings — but that's not teaching them the skills that will take them to their life goals," he said.