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SouthwestNOW

MAGAZINE

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Being BOSI

Cheryl Washington empowers women for better lives

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Cheryl Washington is a woman on a mission. “I spent 30 years as a cosmetologist,” she recalled. “I realized I wasn’t just making these women beautiful, I was helping them with their lives as we discussed the Bible, church, life and parenting. We focus so much on outer beauty. We go to our jobs with a face of perfection. But when we come home and walk in the door, after serving everyone else, we are still unsatisfied. We ask, ‘Who am I?’ This is why BOSI was created. It stands for Beautified Outwardly Satisfied Inwardly.”

Cheryl has learned many of the lessons she teaches, the hard way. “After 21 years of marriage, I had to re-establish myself. My daughter and I lived in a one-bedroom apartment for two years. Although we could only afford a one-bedroom apartment, my daughter was content with making the living room her own space. She never complained. Her contentment inspired me. Some situations are made to mold your character, not make you comfortable.”

BOSI is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) that aims to improve the lives of teen girls, young women and their mothers. “We invest in women age 13 and up in under-served communities, and by under-served, I don’t just mean low income. We teach basic life skills dealing with health, fitness, financial stability, career preparation, business operation and self-awareness. We started with just teens, but then I saw how important parenting is and the need to help parents engage with their children. There is no age cap on BOSI, because daughters learn from their mothers, and mothers learn from their daughters. We do a lot of mother-daughter sessions. We have a strong focus on communication. Everyone finds joy in giving their opinion but fails to listen. As parents, we must be careful with our reactions and be graceful when they make wrong choices.

“When my daughter and I go out to eat, we make it a rule to put our phones away. I use that time to listen and give her my undivided attention. We as mothers should create a safe space for our daughters to share their problems.”

Another way BOSI focuses on communication is in teaching job skills. “Our goal is to show them how to make eye contact and show confidence while talking. When applying for a job, it’s important for us to teach them how to create a résumé and wear professional attire for interviews.

Being

BOSI

— By Adam Walker



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We teach them what they should and should not say during an interview.”

Financial literacy is another big area where BOSI offers help. “We bring in financial advisers to talk about savings and investing. We want them to know about information such as, opening a bank account, writing a check, car insurance, buying a car and how to use credit cards responsibly.”

Cheryl recognizes that for many teens and women, the biggest issue is self-image. “Our number one focus is self-awareness and self-esteem. The first thing when you look in a mirror, what do you see? Is it your flaws? Is it always negative? Look for the beauty within yourself. Everyone is always trying to look the same. Be you. Find what makes you unique. No one else is like you. Learn to love you the way you are — your shape, size, color, your hair. My opening greeting during our sessions is, ‘Y’all are beautiful.’ I had one young lady who broke down crying when I told her she was beautiful. Now she and her mother are volunteers helping BOSI serve more women. Our volunteers help set up sessions, bring new ideas for future sessions, and as they grow, they lead sessions on topics where they have expertise. If you want to volunteer or teach a class, reach out. Women look at each other and compare themselves to each other a lot. I hope that through BOSI, that we can learn each other’s differences. We want to create an environment where we talk to each other, not at each other, while establishing friendships and relationships amongst one another. We need to be transparent and genuine without judging another person’s story and embrace them with love.”

BOSI helps teens and women deal with a whole range of life issues, but some women come to BOSI

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with issues that require professional assistance. This is where Cheryl's network of contacts comes in. "I try to connect them with professionals — with social workers, therapists, nurses. I try to always have resources to connect them to."

Cheryl also tries to keep her finger on changing needs. "I hold a series of sessions called Can We Talk? This gives us an opportunity for the community to tell what is needed. I ask, 'What do you see that is lacking in your community? What is going on in your community that needs attention?' I build the classes and workshops around those discussions." BOSI hosts 10 to 12 workshops each year on topics ranging from make-overs for business professionals to dating violence and human trafficking.



"BOSI is about helping women, affecting positive change and knowing who you are. "Nothing can keep you from your purpose. We need to be leaders and followers. No matter what you've lost, you can gain so much more. You need to have confidence in knowing who you are. I realize the more you give, the more you have. I came to realize that I am unique and loved by God. He made me the woman I am today. I can be beautiful outside and satisfied inside. Our core values are: Give as it has been given to you. Identify the need, and then offer to help. Visualize your goals and work toward them. Equip others with needed resources." **NOW**

Editor's Note: BOSI programs are offered through the DeSoto Public Library. For more information visit www.wearebosi.org.



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