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NCNW, Ashley Stewart Campaign to Empower Black Women, Girls

Posted By [Marcia A. Wade](#) On March 20, 2009 @ 3:04 pm In [Lifestyle](#) | [4 Comments](#)



Dorothy L. Height, 96, president emeritus of the NCNW, far right, says she cherished her mentor, civil rights activist Mary McLeod Bethune, and believes black girls can benefit from mentorship.

Ashley Stewart began their celebration of women's empowerment four months ahead of National Women's History Month, when they announced the "We are Listening" campaign last October. Now, every Tuesday in all 217 Ashley Stewart stores across the country, black women and girls join together with the support of the [National Council of Negro Women](#) ^[1] to mentor, celebrate, and empower one another.

"We have to work harder at intergenerational sharing and giving," Dorothy L. Height, chair and president emeritus of the NCNW, said after a press conference this week announcing the benefits of the program. "I think older people have a responsibility not only for sharing our history, but also recognizing the new changes and the new things to which we have to adapt and move forward."

Sponsored by the [Ashley Stewart Stores Community Foundation](#) ^[2], the "We are Listening" program was created to provide "safe spaces" for young women under 35 and older women in the African American community. At the Tuesday meetings, the women and girls discuss topics ranging from domestic violence to education and cancer prevention.

Since the program's inception in November, each week 1,800 women of all races have paid the \$30 membership fee to join the NCNW through Ashley Stewart stores. This week the ASSCF presented Height and the NCNW with a check representing funds raised through the end of Dec. 2008. Customers who join the NCNW receive a one-time 20% discount and a 10% discount for one year on all purchases at Ashley Stewart Stores.

The intent of the campaign is to shed unflattering perceptions that are heaped on black women by society and even themselves, and help melt disparities that disproportionately affect black women.

"So often when we think of black women in this culture, it is just a sexualized image or an image of victimhood," says Avis Jones DeWeever, an affiliate scholar at the [Institute for](#)

[Women's Policy Research](#) ^[3] and the director of research at the NCNW. "I think it is a wonderful example of corporate responsibility and giving back to the community by a company that didn't have to do it but they did," says DeWeever.

Ashley Stewart, a division of Urban Brands, is not alone in its undertaking to empower women and girls. President Barack Obama has initiated a federal response to the challenges confronted by women and girls with the creation of the White House Council on Women and Girls. The council will ensure that all federal agencies take into account the particular needs of women and girls, including topics such as family leave and child care. Three out of four low-wage workers have [no paid sick leave](#) ^[4], according to the White House.

DeWeever believes that paid sick leave is critically important, especially for black women, because they have the highest labor force participation rate of any group of women. Also, she says black women tend to be clustered in very low wage jobs with little access to health benefits.

Ashley Stewart Stores is one corporation that is ahead in the game on this issue, says Mary Kay Devine, director of work force development policy, at [Women Employed](#) ^[5], an organization that helps to remove barriers to economic equity for working women. With a workforce that is made up of 98% blacks and 97% women, Ashley Stewart offers full-time associates paid, short-term disability and six to eight weeks of maternity leave.

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URLs in this post:

[1] **National Council of Negro Women:** <http://www.ncnw.org/>

[2] **Ashley Stewart Stores Community Foundation:** <http://ascommunityfoundation.com/>

[3] **Institute for Women's Policy Research:** <http://www.iwpr.org/index.cfm>

[4] **no paid sick leave:** <http://www.whitehouse.gov/agenda/women/>

[5] **Women Employed:** <http://www.womenemployed.org/index.php?id=6>

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