



The Triangle TRIBUNE

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Overnight: Partly cloudy with a low of 70

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Ministry pampers disadvantaged women

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DURHAM - Women who struggle to re-enter the workforce after a felony conviction or domestic violence situation were treated to a refreshing day of pampering to take their mind off their obstacles and focus on bettering themselves.

"Along the way bad stuff happens, but we're here for good so keep going," said Pastor Sandra Lilly of Eagles' Summit Christian Fellowship Church.

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The church's women's ministry, Restored Enough For Relationships that are Encouraging, Supportive and Healthy, sponsored the "Mind, Body and Soul: The Total You" event Sept. 19 at the El Centro Hispano. Highlights included Mary Kay facials and manicures, food, school supplies for the children, a book bag giveaway, and words of encouragement and hope from Lilly.

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InStepp Inc. is a nonprofit charitable organization with the goal of working to improve the lives of local at-risk adults and adolescents. The REFRESH ministry sponsored the day for the clients of InStepp in its Employment Re-entry Assistance Program.

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The ERA is a no-cost program that provides job placement assistance, post-employment support, and one-on-one mentoring support and life skills workshops to adult women who are on probation or parole, ex-offenders or victims of domestic violence.

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InStepp was founded in 2004 and the ERA program launched in April

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2007. The pampering day is the first collaborative event with REFRESH. Lilly said they decided to sponsor the event because a lot of what they do in their ministry is similar to what InStepp is doing. Both are restoring women's lives.

Gilda Womble, executive director of InStepp, said she appreciated that REFRESH organized the pampering day for her clients. Volunteers are also putting together an advocacy video for them.

Kimberly West, a single mother, said she enjoyed having a day to just relax with other women since she doesn't have much time to focus on herself. West also testified in the video that it was difficult getting even an hourly job or an apartment after she served time for selling cocaine.

"They need to give people a second chance that just made a mistake," she said.

Another client, Shamora Charles, who has a record after getting into a fight in high school, agrees. "It's [InStepp] opened doors that weren't open before," she said.

West, who recently found a full-time job in Hillsborough, said the program assisted her with putting together a resume and getting interview clothes through its partnership with "Dress For Success."

The nonprofit agency promotes economic independence for disadvantaged women by providing professional attire to interview for jobs and to re-enter the workforce.

"When no one's willing to give you a chance, InStepp is willing to give you a chance," she said. "They are like your private human resources."

