

# BOSTON Herald

## sew cool

Program moves teens closer to realizing design dreams

By **Jill Radsken**/ Sense of Style  
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Amity Paye has loved fashion since she was a child and has four notebooks full of sketches to prove it.

But this summer, the 16-year-old Boston Latin School junior actually made the clothes she's been sketching in a new fashion program at Artists for Humanity.

AFH is a South Boston-based nonprofit that provides at-risk teens jobs in the arts, and Paye was one of 14 students who spent the last two months designing a minicollection while getting paid \$7 an hour to do so.

"They're so intense about their designs," said Nahdira Ra, the program's instructor, who was born in Ethiopia and raised in Boston.

Most of the students, Ra said, had never cut a pattern, much less used a sewing machine. But now, "they really understand how to construct a garment from top to bottom."

Each student's assignment was the same: construct two new outfits, deconstruct and rework a vintage outfit and make a backpack. The ensembles were unveiled at an end-of-summer fashion show Tuesday, and AFH plans to produce one of the backpacks to raise money for the program.

"It's been extremely successful," said Susan Rodgeron, executive director of AFH, who hopes to continue the fashion program in the fall.

The program's success is evident just by talking to some of the kids. Massiel Grullon, a talented painter, has been coming to AFH since she was 12. But working with Ra, Grullon said, has been a transforming experience.

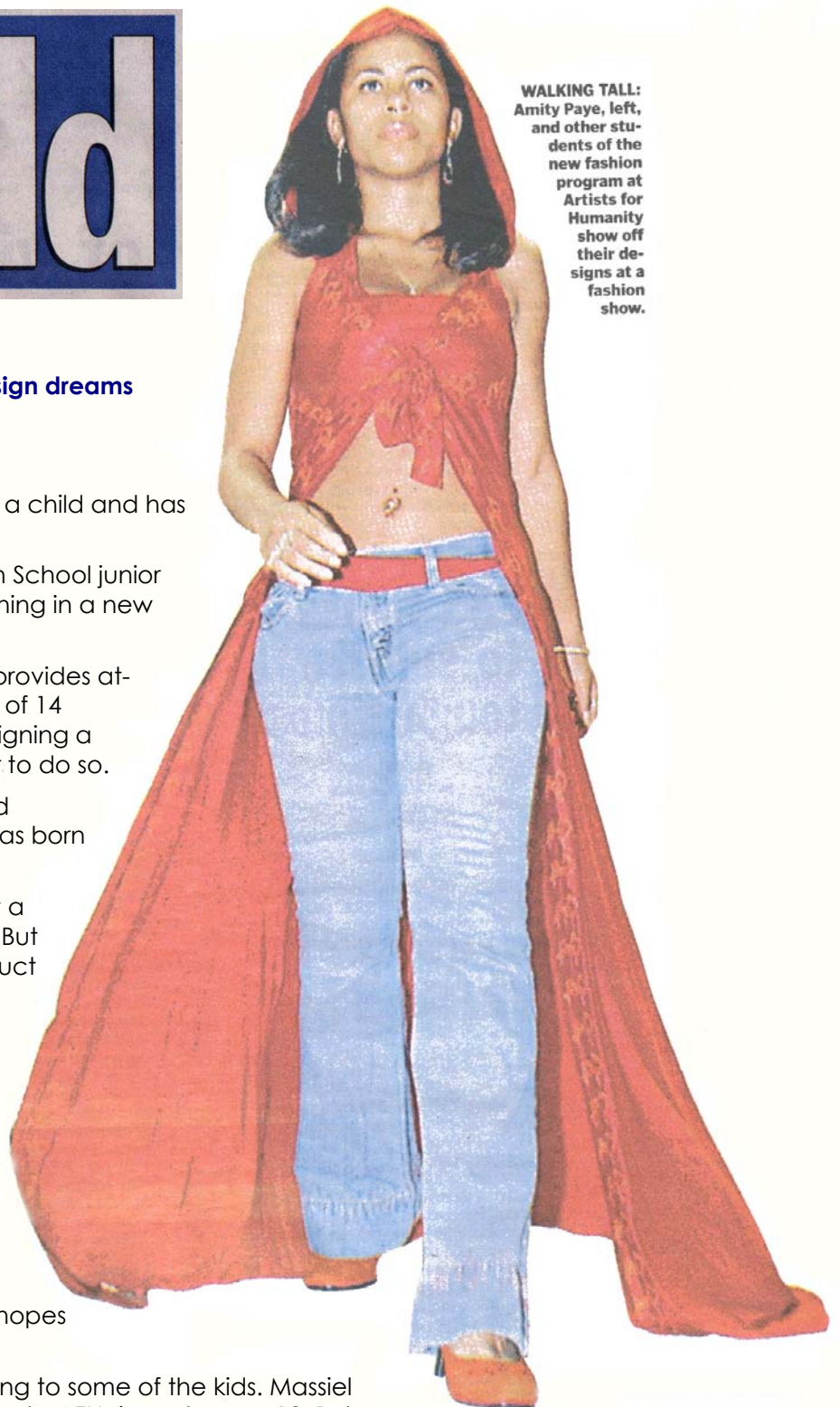
"Before I came into fashion I was a very dull person, a very simple girl," said the 18-year-old, who designed one of her outfits from an infant toy. "Fashion has really helped me become who I am today."

Sixteen-year-old Denisse Mayers, who hopes to attend Rhode Island School of Design after she graduates from Boston Latin Academy this year, said AFH has helped her focus on her goal.

Besides, Mayers said, "it barely feels like work."

"Even if I wasn't getting paid, I'd still come," she said.

**WALKING TALL:**  
Amity Paye, left,  
and other stu-  
dents of the  
new fashion  
program at  
Artists for  
Humanity  
show off  
their de-  
signs at a  
fashion  
show.



Amity Paye is the 2005-2006 Jamaica Plain Representative on the Mayor's Youth Council