

A PROGRAM THAT SAVES TEENAGERS (REALLY)

BY BETH SARAFRAZ

Akilah Robinson, 16, grew up in Antigua and came to live in Flatbush last September. Robinson, now in the 12th grade at Abraham Lincoln High School, wasn't doing that well. She was barely passing, but now her average is 90. Robinson describes the Saturday tutoring program offered by Liberty Partnerships on the Kingsborough campus as the reason she passed the grueling Math A Regents.

Attending the Life Skills class taught by Liberty's Project Director, Roderick B. Wilson, Robinson learned how to prepare herself for college and get through the application process. Wilson told her about a program offered by Barnard University for students from low-income families and she is now applying to Barnard College with the intention of becoming a doctor. She will be the first member of her family to attend college.

The Liberty Partnerships Program at Kingsborough Community College is a free program that helps retain and successfully graduate 'at risk' teenagers from five area high schools—Abraham Lincoln, William Grady, Sheepshead Bay, James Madison, and the brand new High School for Civil Rights, located on the Thomas Jefferson campus.

When Hilma Shannon, the guidance counselor at Lincoln High School, explored the program, she was convinced the results produced inspired her to join the team and become a Liberty advocate counselor at her school. She meets with students like Robinson every month.

"I see a lot of kids who don't think they have college in their future. The Liberty program gives them a perspective that they can be there and then it actually gets them there," says

Shannon, a member of the club for seven years.

The program, funded by the New York State Department of Education. In addition to the Saturday tutoring program, Liberty's Parent-Engagement Coordinator Dr. N.S. Silva, helps the kids find summer jobs and internships that often

turn into full-time career paths. Liberty offers the kids trips, too, to places they've never seen. Robinson says they took her camping upstate New York. "We stayed in cabins with fireplaces," she says, "This was the first time in my life that I ever went on a camping trip."

"I can't believe these kids get up early Saturday morning to go to the program. Some of these kids who I work with have learning problems. It's winter, it's freezing cold – but they go," says Doris Rivera, a special education teacher and dean at Lincoln.

Paul Watson is Liberty's Mentor Coordinator, matching up high school kids with college students. "You need a 3.0 average to be a mentor," he says. Mentors are volunteers who like helping people. They meet once a week with their assigned high school students, and attend monthly meetings as a group.

Dr. Margaret Governo, of Coney Island

Hospital's Pediatrics Department and Professor of Nursing at Wagner College, conducts Teen Screens for Liberty's high school enrollees, to help them with the emotional, intellectual, and academic stress of life in New York City. A member of Liberty's Advisory Council for 2006-2007, like Officer DaSilva and eleven others, she is a firm believer in the effectiveness of the total program. She says "our kids just bloom."

Captain Vincent Stella, Commanding Officer of the 61 Precinct is someone who frequently sees the flip side of teenage life, confronting situations with troubled and out of control kids. Upon hearing about the Liberty program, which serves two high schools within his precinct – Sheepshead Bay and James Madison, he says, "I like this. It's another resource that the precinct could use in helping at-risk children." One of Stella's officers, P.O. Amber Cafaro, says, "I think it's a great idea. I would love to volunteer to get more police involved."

"My personal feeling is that too many students do not see a future for themselves," concludes Project Director Roderick B. Wilson. "We can show them a way to go and help them get there, to a better place."

There is an old saying: "If you save one life, it's like you saved the whole world." After hearing from a variety of teenagers about how Liberty Partnerships Program at Kingsborough rescued them and raised them up (along with their grades), I believe I witnessed a short course in miracles.

To get involved or learn more about Liberty Partnerships Program at Kingsborough Community College, you can contact Project Director Roderick B. Wilson, at 718-368-5767 or email him, at RWilson@Kingsborough.edu.



Liberty Partnerships Program At KCC Team: Standing from the left, Joseph Castelli, Roderick B. Wilson, Paul Watson, Jacinta Alexander; Seated from the left, Hilma Shannon, Susan Flynn, Juliet Salcedo, Barbara Kapitansky

ASK BROOKLYN

Name one thing you didn't do in 2007 that you wish you had.



Angela Garcia

"I would have learned more about Americans and the political system."

-- Midwood



Debra Greif

"I never got around to reorganizing my room. I'm always running around."

-- Gravesend



Donna Weinstein

"I know it sounds odd, but I volunteer so much, I wish I could take a day off for myself."

-- Marine Park



Ed Eisenberg

"I would distribute even more Brooklyn Views."

-- Manhattan Beach



Hazel Cyrus

"I wanted to take mom, who's 83, for a cruise and I didn't get around to do that."

--East Flatbush



Lew Fidler

"I regret not seeing the Mets win Game 7 of the World Series this year."

-- Councilmember



Matthew Eugene

"I would make more of an effort to make sure kids graduate from high school and get the education they need."

-- Councilmember



Melony Weinstein

"I think I accomplished everything I wanted to."

-- Marine Park



Sgt. Shaune Stepheny

"Buy a new car."

-- U.S. Marine



Steve Weinstein

"I'm pretty satisfied."

-- Marine Park