

fall 2010 newsletter

success stories



Photo: Federico Rodriguez

Graduation 2010

Celebrating the Class of 2010

“Class of 2010... We did it!” Upon hearing these jubilant words during a classmate’s speech, the newly graduated South Brooklyn Community High School (SBCHS) students loudly and proudly cheered, delighted to be reaching the milestone of their high school graduation—a milestone that, for many of them, was once thought to be unattainable.

South Brooklyn Community High School, along with West Brooklyn Community High School and Bronx Community High School, form Good Shepherd Services’ network of successful transfer schools. Operated in equal partnership with the New York City Department of Education (DOE), our schools are designed to offer students who have previously dropped out or fallen off-track in traditional high schools a second chance at earning their high school diploma, while also preparing them for college and careers. We believe that given the necessary supports and opportunities, all young people have the ability to succeed. We seek to maximize our students’ potential by surrounding them with supportive administrators and teachers who provide focused, individualized academic programs, and Good Shepherd advocate counselors, who serve as each student’s primary support person at school.

This year, graduation ceremonies for all three transfer schools were held on June 24, 2010. Bronx Community High School held its celebrations in its auditorium and West Brooklyn’s ceremony took place at Telecommunications High School in Bay Ridge. The SBCHS festivities were held at St. Francis College, where 30 students proudly received their diplomas in front of their classmates, friends, families, teachers, counselors, and administrators. Overall, 129 students successfully graduated from our three transfer schools this year and 1,222 youth in total graduated from our Multiple Pathways programs.

After an introduction by school leaders, Millie Henriquez-McArdle, the GSS program director and Principal Louis Garcia, keynote speaker Andrew Martir, a high school guidance

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LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends:

The neighborhoods where Good Shepherd’s programs are located confront the very real challenges of poverty, drug abuse, violence, and unemployment. For some, these issues may be all they see. But we see something much more—we see young people and families with great untapped potential who are eager to succeed.

From our earliest days, Good Shepherd has advocated for and given voice to the needs of those who might otherwise be forgotten. Our belief in the power and potential of youth motivates us to continually improve our practice and develop new programs and service models to ensure that our participants believe in themselves as we do.

This month, youth all over the city are returning to school, and so are the staff members at our various school-based programs. To prepare for the school year, and to further the agency’s strategic direction to deepen our educational support work, 125 of our Multiple Pathways to Graduation staff recently came together to reflect on the past year’s accomplishments, plan for the future, and work together to create a “college going” culture at each of their program sites. This year, 1,222 young people graduated from our Multiple Pathways programs.

For many of our young people a positive connection with a Good Shepherd staff member is the only thing keeping them in school and their hopes for the future alive. In this issue of “Success Stories,” we are delighted share with you examples of how we are doing just that through a new high school program in Brooklyn, a summer camp in the Bronx, and the stories of our alumni.

Thank you for remembering the youth and families in the communities in which we work. Together, we can make a difference in their lives.

Sincerely,

Aleutete Lo Monaco

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Alumni Success Stories

For young people in Good Shepherd's Multiple Pathways to Graduation programs, former participants who have successfully moved on with their lives are powerful sources of inspiration and motivation. Recently, students and their families had the opportunity to hear from Martin and Nikara, alumni who served as the keynote speakers at the West Brooklyn Community High School (WBCHS) and Manhattan Access GED commencement ceremonies respectively. While these two young adults had very different stories to share, their messages were strikingly similar. Both spoke positively about the support and encouragement they received and urged the new graduates to aim high, withstand the challenges, and pursue their dreams.

Nikara entered our Access GED program in 2006 after coming to the US from Jamaica, where she had been out of school for a while. At Access she found a caring staff, who not only helped her to complete her education but also supported her in developing job readiness skills and entering college. In our full-time program, Nikara was able to take on an internship, visit colleges, and get help securing financial aid. Even after she began attending the Borough of Manhattan Community College, she continued to come back to our program to get advice and support from her counselors. In May 2010, she earned her Associate's degree in early childhood education and is now going on to City College to pursue a double major in child psychology



Pilot and WBCHS alum, Martin, during one of his flights

and education. "It was an emotional experience speaking to the students," says Nikara. "There were times I felt I wasn't going to graduate. At times it seemed so difficult to finish. It felt good to encourage them not to give up and not to let the challenges keep holding them back from what they can do in the future."

When Martin came to WBCHS, one of our three transfer school schools, he was already in his fourth year of high school, but had only 9.7

of the 44 credits needed to graduate. While he had once been a good student, he lost his way in the large high school he attended and got caught in a downward spiral of not completing assignments and cutting class. At WBCHS, Martin immediately responded to the tightly knit school community, where he was treated like family and where any absence was noted immediately. He felt that the staff always believed in him and supported him not only in his quest to get his

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Celebrating the Class of 2010



Photo: Federico Rodriguez

counselor and college advisor, gave a moving speech about his own fulfilling experience graduating from a transfer school similar to SBCHS. He impressed the importance of education upon the students, highlighting the fact that the diplomas they were receiving represented something that could never be taken away from them: knowledge.

Several graduates also spoke after receiving their diplomas, congratulating their fellow students and expressing praise and gratitude for the administration and staff that helped them succeed, especially their advocate counselors. One student valued her counselor because he provided the encouragement needed to help her make it through her senior year, "I could never in a million years see him give up on me," she said. Advocate counselors had the opportunity to return the favor, as they introduced the students they worked with, sharing stories and

kind words about each. The genuine appreciation and admiration between students and their counselors was palpable, highlighting the positive relationships that abound at SBCHS. Graduate Ashley Torres described it best by saying, "Being here is like having another family."

The celebration concluded with a brief speech from Sr. Paulette LoMonaco, Good Shepherd's executive director, who congratulated the students on their achievement and wished them luck in their future endeavors, which, for many, include plans to continue on to college, something that seemed impossible only a few short years ago. As graduate Curtis Roberson, who concluded his SBCHS classes in the summer of 2009 and just finished his first year of college, said to his fellow students in his speech, "Life is hard, and they never said it was going to be easy, so if you made it this far you might as well keep on going and never give up."

A NEW PARTNERSHIP WITH JPMORGAN CHASE AND BUSHWICK LEADERS HIGH SCHOOL

This fall, thousands of New York City children and teens will experience their very first day at a new school, and so will Good Shepherd. Last winter, we were invited by Bushwick Leaders High School (BLHS) in Bushwick, Brooklyn to serve as the lead community-based agency at the school. Through the generous support of JPMorgan Chase, this brand new school-based support program will fully launch in September, serving approximately 400 students in grades 9 through 12.

A Good Shepherd team consisting of a program director, social worker, advocate counselor, and youth development specialist will collaborate with BLHS principal, Cathy Reilly and her staff to help fulfill the long term vision for the school—to transform it into a full service educational environment that offers its students social and emotional support. In addition, plans are underway to provide a rich after-school program and Saturday activities for all of the young people in the community.

While Bushwick is beginning to see signs

of growth and rebirth, it is still a community in need, with more than 75% of children born into poverty and a significant dropout rate. “At the school, they definitely need some extra support for their students,” says Brooklyn division director, Jennifer Zanger, who oversees the program. “Many students are dealing with issues like gang activity and losing a parent, and exhibiting behaviors that put them at-risk for dropping out like truancy, poor academic performance and literacy issues,” she adds.

Our program, grounded in Good Shepherd’s signature strength-based approach to working with young people, will provide students with the personalized support they need to overcome any roadblock in their way to academic success. The program’s social worker, Heti Baker, got a head start by working at the summer school program, which gave her a great opportunity to get to know some of the young people returning to school this fall. She also plans to take part in the orientation sessions for each grade to introduce Good

Shepherd to the students and let them know about the services we offer.

Heti and the advocate counselor, Michael Herrera, will provide young people with short and long term individual counseling, group counseling, crisis intervention, classroom workshops, and family counseling, as needed. We will also assist the school in the planning and implementation of “advisory groups”—daily peer support groups of 12-15 students, led by a teacher. These groups ensure that each young person has at least one strong connection with a caring adult at school.

The special one-to-one relationships all BLHS students develop with both the GSS and school staff members will provide them with the nurturing attention they need to recognize their own innate abilities and talents, set long and short term goals, and take responsibility for their future.

We look forward to being a part of this school community and to helping a new group of students realize their great potential.

Learning to Change the World

Over the summer you may have noticed large groups of children clad in identical brightly colored t-shirts riding the subway, walking around a museum or the zoo, or just enjoying a beach day at Coney Island. Most likely these were youth from one of the city’s many summer camp programs. Good Shepherd operates seven of these programs throughout Brooklyn and the Bronx, keeping children and teens safe and engaged when school is out.

For six weeks in July and August our young people took part in traditional camp experiences like arts and crafts, swimming lessons, sports, and field trips. But campers at the MS 45 Beacon received something in addition to the usual activities, as staff infused every aspect of the program with messages of positive change and personal empowerment.

The theme for this year’s camp was Changing the World. “We started off each day with a different inspirational quote and asked the youth to reflect on it,” says Stanley Romulus, who oversees the MS 45 Beacon camp program. Campers heard wise words from a diverse array of public figures, including Stevie Wonder, Mother Theresa, Magic Johnson, Les Brown, and Mahatma Gandhi, whose famous quote “You must be the change you wish to see in the world,” kicked off the program and set the tone



for the summer.

To build a bridge between camp and the new school year, campers read newspaper articles about various current events and social and economic issues affecting their community and thought of ways to make those issues better. In addition, they learned more about environmental issues like pollution, land use, and water quality and created projects that focused on how to use their newfound knowledge to make the world a better place.

At the end of each week, campers put their collective creative skills to use by creating a chant about a different social cause, to deliver a message to the world. The seven year-old group had this to say, “We want PEACE...if you ask us, we’re ready!”

We look forward to continuing to work with these bright young people in the fall at the Beacon’s after-school program, helping them to develop their full potential to make a positive impact on the world around them.

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Matching Gifts

Many companies have a matching gift program. You can maximize your contribution to us by completing the appropriate matching gift form. Please log on to www.goodshepherds.org to see if your company matches gifts.

Workplace Giving

Direct your United Way contribution to Good Shepherd Services by marking **001138** on your pledge card. You will also find us listed in the campaign brochures of the State Employee Federated Appeal, the Combined Municipal Campaign, the Combined Federal Campaign and the CUNY Campaign for Voluntary Charitable Giving.

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Alumni Success Stories

high school diploma, but to become a pilot.

Within a year of his graduation, Martin secured his private pilot's license and then, in May 2010, he completed all the requirements necessary to become a commercial pilot. At the WBCHS graduation ceremony, Martin related an unnerving experience that occurred soon after he got his private pilot's license. Set to record his longest solo cross-country flight from Texas to Nebraska, he was forced to make an emergency landing in a Kansas wheat field when the plane's engine stalled. While this incident made Martin momentarily question his vocation, ultimately it only increased his passion and determination to fly.

Like Nikara, Martin was full of words of encouragement for his audience: "Now the reason I really wanted to share this with you is to show you that if someone that was sitting right where you all are can go out and pursue and accomplish his dream, all of you can also go and do the same. All you need is motivation and a passion for what you wish to accomplish. Believe me no matter how hard it may be to get there; you will be successful if you don't let anything or anyone get in your way."

GO GREEN!

The Success Stories newsletter is now available electronically. Published three times a year, the newsletter keeps you up-to-date on Good Shepherd's latest program activities. If you would prefer to receive Success Stories via email, rather than by mail, please contact Nada Awad at 212-243-7070, ext. 313 or email her at Nada_Awad@goodshepherds.org.

FIND US ON FACEBOOK

Good Shepherd Services recently launched a Facebook page and would like to invite those who use Facebook to become a fan of our work, by connecting to the GSS page. The page features links to videos about how our work has impacted individual participants, as well as photos of our programs in action. A link to the Facebook page is provided on the homepage of the GSS website (www.goodshepherds.org) or just type "Good Shepherd Services" into the Facebook search engine.



Photo: Laura Dwight

MONTHLY GIVING PROGRAM

Good Shepherd now has a monthly giving program! A simple and easy way to support our work with New York City children, young people and families, monthly contributions can be made in any amount. For more information about monthly giving, please contact Nicole Marie Boisvert at 212-243-7070, ext. 327 or via email Nicole_Boisvert@goodshepherds.org

ANNUAL FUND

Partner with Good Shepherd as we work to help young people build stronger connections to family, school and community. As reflected in this newsletter, we have been working to strengthen, deepen and expand our services so that more young people can be helped in making a safe passage to self-sufficiency. In these uncertain times, your support is all the more important, as we continue to serve as a model for other agencies helping vulnerable youth and families. Please consider helping us reach our Annual Fund goal by sending in your contribution today. Alternatively, you may donate online at: www.goodshepherds.org.