

Local families open their doors to our scholars

For Andover families, becoming an ABC host family can mean gaining an addition to the family for four years, and a friend for life.

The host family experience always has been critical to the program success of A Better Chance of Andover. To broaden the life-changing ABC program, each scholar is paired with an Andover family that volunteers to be a host. Scholars join their host family every Wednesday after school until study hours and one weekend a month. That makes the host family an integral piece of the web of support for the young women in their academic pursuits at Andover High, social development and overall wellbeing.

Brenda Bryan had been a three-time host parent – for Zola Primo, '04; Jessica Spates, '08; and Jazzare Mayes, '14 – when her second host daughter, Jessica, moved back in with the Bryans several years after graduating from Wesleyan University.

“It was my first boomerang child experience, and I was so excited!” she recalls.

Jessica had been living in her hometown of New York City, working in retail when Bryan suggested that she move back to her ABC hosts' home. In turn they would help her to get her driver's license and purchase a used car so she could broaden her job search. Jessica accepted and soon found a professional position at a teen residential program, and a place to live--she is now a Resident Assistant back at the ABC House.

During the first year for a host family and scholar, the process can feel like a blind date. Donna Crowther, host parent to Shakiya Snipes, '00, recalls her initial arrival at their home. “We had three big, affectionate dogs and she was not a fan [of them]. We didn't think she was going to get



Nancy Vogler

President's view

I am at ABC House on a beautiful fall afternoon as our students return from school. I hear backpacks drop to the floor, followed by animated voices and laughter in the kitchen. Adding to the liveliness are three new students: Déanna, Elise and Jenni. New students often bring fresh enthusiasm and theirs is positively infectious.

When I leave later in the afternoon, I can't help smiling for the rest of the day!

With new students come new host families. As a former host parent, I understand the far-reaching impact that the program has on the lives of both the student and host family. It provides each student with another way to experience Andover by taking part with her host family in town activities or just enjoying family life itself.



ABC host parents Jim and Robin Buhner of Andover took the ABC student they host, sophomore Nilda Vega (left), and their daughter, Lauren, to New York City to see the revival of *Pippin*.

out of the car, let alone stay in our house.” One week later, however, Shakiya was down on the family rug, playing with all three.

Other challenges facing Shakiya included eating anything “green,” surviving the New England cold, and facing differing holiday traditions. Kelsey Crowther, host sister and a first-grader when Shakiya joined their family, remembers the many hours that she and Shakiya played cards together. “My sister had gone to boarding school,” Kelsey says. “Shakiya really became a surrogate older sister to me.”

Nancy Kendrick, host parent (Argelia Taide Byers Broadbelt, '94) and current Host Family Coordinator at ABC, recalls the decision to become an ABC host family after seeing an article in the *Andover Townsman*. (continued inside)

My husband and I had just become empty nesters with two daughters away at college when we first met our host daughter Felicia. She left a failing school system in her hometown of Anaheim, Calif., to come to Andover High School for a better chance at a quality education.

As her host family, we were not a substitute for her parents, but rather a source of adult support, a soft place to land in times of stress. When she was with us, it was like she was part of the family. We made meals she liked; enjoyed sharing her favorite TV shows; drove her to rehearsals and practices; cheered for her at fashion shows, dance recitals and powder puff football; talked about life at Andover High; and did whatever we could to smooth her path through high school.

In Felicia's senior year, our older daughter got married. Felicia was there when she picked out her wedding dress, and she came to the wedding. A picture of my “three daughters” taken that day still sits on my kitchen windowsill. (continued inside)



Incoming students value AHS education

ABC Board Members

Nancy Vogler
President

Sophia Alexander
Susan Connolly
Lynn Hook
Vice Presidents

Robin Gendron
Noreen Marton
Co-Treasurers

Cynthia Marsh
Secretary

Donna Crowther
Linda Griffith
Dan Hall
Arlene Hawkins
Nancy Kendrick
Kate Margolese

Dot McGlincy
Mary Beth Nason
Gaby Nossiff
Toby Coltin O'leary
Mary Pritchard

Resident Director
Catherine Okoh &
Richard Komeh

Resident Assistants
Kelly Mahoney
Jessica Spates

Scholars' Hosts
Yasmine & Jorge Allen
Robin & Jim Buhner
Carol & Brian Carmichael
Melanie & Mark Cutler
Erin & Daniel Donovan
Gaby & John Nossiff
Ruthy & Stephen Olney
Julie & Ames Prentiss

More news and photos at
AndoverABC.org

Three new students – two 9th-graders and one sophomore – have moved into ABC House this fall.

Jenni Nguyen, a 9th-grader this fall at Andover High, applied to ABC on the recommendation of a family friend who had been an ABC scholar because she felt that the local high school in Orlando, Fla., wouldn't offer her a challenging academic experience.

At AHS she has joined the Debate club, school newspaper and the Gay Straight Alliance. "I wanted to do something after school every day but my advisor told me to start slowly," she says. She is eyeing the swim team as well, and hopes to be able to try out next year.

Jenni's favorite subject is math, but this year she also is excited about her freshman English course. She says that she likes psychology and sociology, explaining, "I'm interested in human behavior."

Coming to Andover has been an easy adjustment, she says, and one of the biggest surprises has been how "nice and accommodating" ABC and its scholars have been.

Déanna Clarke-Campbell says she turned to ABC even though she "loved the atmosphere" of the creative and performing arts high school she attended in downtown Philadelphia because "I was not being challenged at all" academically.

As a sophomore at AHS, she has sought out the creative avenues she loves by joining the Show Choir. She loves to act and sing, and she plays the piano and violin. She also is in the Gay Straight Alliance.

As for academics, Déanna gravitates to math, science and history. She has big dreams for the future, rattling off a list of professions, from cardio-thoracic surgeon, astrophysicist or Broadway actor or some combination of those.

Adjusting to the quiet, small town feel of Andover continues to be a challenge for her after living in a city. "People do the same thing every day," she notes.

For freshman **Elise Ray Cabrera** of Harlem, NY, her three older sisters have set a bar of high academic achievement. The oldest attended Mt. Holyoke College and currently works at ABC national. The other two currently attend equally competitive colleges.

In the small arts-and-music-focused school in Harlem, Elise was in the student government but



Getting into the dish-washing routine at ABC House are (from left) Elise Cabrera, Jenni Nguyen and Déanna Clarke-Campbell.

she explains that the academics, particularly math, were leaving her behind. "I wanted to have a new experience... and to be exposed to different ways of teaching," she explains. Elise likes English, science and world civilization. She also has joined the Show Choir, Gay Straight Alliance and AHS newspaper.

Elise is considering future professions including artist, musician (she plays piano and guitar) and Broadway actor. She can even imagine running for president of the United States. "Everyone has a view of what makes a good president. I'd like to see if I could do a good job in the opinion of all sides."

What we do



A BETTER CHANCE
POWERING THE AMERICAN DREAM

The mission of A Better Chance is to close the education gap for students of color in American society.

- Founded in 1967, we bring smart, motivated female students of color here so they can attend Andover High School to prepare for college.
- Thanks to the generosity of people like you, we provide them with lodging on Main Street and a network of support and love.
- Our 134 graduates have been accepted by highly selective colleges and universities. Many also have earned graduate degrees and become professional and community leaders.
- For more, visit AndoverABC.org, or follow A Better Chance of Andover on Facebook.



Local families *(continued from page 1)*

"At the time I was working full-time and had two elementary-age children and wanted to become involved in the community." In hindsight, she says, it might not have been the best time to take on a teen.

Fortunately, "it was really a match made in heaven," states Kendrick. "Argelia, now known as Taide, was happy to participate in the activities that elementary kids do -- apple picking, movie nights. I think we just lucked out."

Kendrick emphasizes that no host family is ever alone in the journey; all along the way, ABC provides a web of support for both the girls and the families.

"We have girls who are black African, Jamaican and Southeast Asian, to name a few," explains Gaby Nossiff, host parent for Fatouma Koné, '15. "These are not broad brushstroke categories, like being white or black; each has a very unique set of traditions and culturally specific ways of being in the world. We as a host family certainly had to learn a lot about Fatouma and her family, and we made adjustments."

Bryan describes the first year with a scholar as a year in which overall expectations need to be very low. By the middle of sophomore year, she says, a shift and a confidence allow them to engage more actively in the family and in building relationships. She believes a key to success is teaching the scholars concrete ways to be part of an Andover family. "It's life skills -- learning to build and maintain relationships."

The experience can have a lasting impact on both parties. "Being a host family has opened our eyes to a new culture and exposed our own children to diversity," Nossiff notes. "It has helped them be comfortable befriending kids from different backgrounds. They've also become more sensitive to the struggles that stem from socioeconomic disadvantages."

For the ABC student, it can shape the future. Chandra Brown, '90, recalls that it was "a perfect match" to be paired with Tom Sharkey, former AHS principal who was principal of Billerica High at the time, and Eileen Sharkey, a North Andover elementary school teacher. Brown has gone on to become principal of an elementary school in Maryland.

The relationship continues after ABC. Kendrick recounted Taide's wedding two years ago. Now a fashion designer and teacher at the Fashion High School of New York, Taide gave an unexpected toast to Kendrick and her husband, Jim. "She said that she understood that our commitment to her

was through her high school graduation, but that she knew from that day on we would be there for her, always."

This past October, the Crowthers went to NYC to meet a cousin visiting from Sweden and visit the 9/11 museum in honor of a family member who died in the attack. They were joined by Shakiya, who is completing her certificate of Non-Profit Management at Fordham University.

"It was really wonderful to share our family and our stories with Shakiya. It was a powerful day," recalls Gwynn Crowther.

He remembers fondly the years with Shakiya under his roof: "As a host father, my goal was really to make her understand that there was something beyond the few blocks of the South Bronx." They took her on hikes, to sandy beaches on the Cape, tried new food (lobster!), and showed her a world of opportunity for her wellbeing.

Every experience as an ABC host family is different and, like all human endeavors, can include difficult challenges and great satisfactions. Asked what she would tell a family thinking of becoming an ABC host family, Donna Crowther puts it almost as emphatically as Nike does: "Do it!"

CURRENT HOST FAMILIES

Yasmine & Jorge Allen	Erin & Daniel Donovan
Robin & Jim Buhner	Gaby & John Nossiff
Carol & Brian Carmichael	Ruthy & Stephen Olney
Melanie & Mark Cutler	Julie & Ames Prentiss

President's view *(continued from page 1)*

The day we heard Felicia was accepted to University of Southern California, her first choice college, we were as excited and proud as we had been when our own daughters got into college. Today she is a sophomore at USC, and I have to brag a little, because she got straight A's last semester.

As host parents, we felt like we were in a unique position to aid a motivated student who was taking advantage of a special opportunity. And, yes, it is a cliché to say this, but we learned a lot about ourselves and what minority students experience here in Andover. So we all have realized the goal of ABC's host-family program: we are left with a host of great memories, and Felicia has a bright future ahead of her.

Nancy

'10 grads win degrees

ABC's two 2010 graduates -- Camilla Ekokobe and Justene Salomon -- have received their B.A. degrees.

Camilla, who came to ABC from the Bronx, NY, graduated last spring from Wheaton College with a B.A. in English. Her host parents in Andover were Emily and Kevin Donovan.

Justene Salomon, of Brooklyn, NY, received a B.A. in psychology from Sacred Heart University. She was hosted in Andover by Ian and Allison Dowe.

Congratulations, Justene and Camilla!

Alumna gives back

Simone R. McBean Yatrakis, who graduated from Andover High in 1990, is currently senior counsel in the New York office of the RPCK Rastegar Panchal specializing in private equity and corporate matters.

She earned her B.S. from Northwestern University and her J.D. from Fordham University School of Law.

Simone also gives back to A Better Chance by serving on its National Advisory Council.

In addition, she is founder and owner of Rockin the Mix, a clothing brand.

Volunteers Needed

Do you have time for a volunteer project? If you are willing to help with one of these ABC tasks, please tell our House Manager at house@AndoverABC.org

- Paint a room
- Organize historic archives and files
- Assist with a mailing
- Cook Saturday breakfast for students

Jetons: ABC merits your support

We have been connected to Andover ABC for over 25 years and have enjoyed every minute of it! What touches us the most is the opportunity to help change lives, fundamentally and profoundly. We sense that these young women emerge from this experience more mature, more reflective and more cognizant of the world and opportunities around them.

To listen to the seniors at the ABC annual meeting talk about how this experience – both positive and negative – has helped them grow as young women is both an emotional moment and an affirmation that this is work worthy of support.

And yet this is not a one-way street. These students also bring to our community diversity, different perspectives, and a willingness to take a risk in coming to a town and a school substantially different from their own. As parents, we admire their gumption and their courage.

We encourage every member of the Andover community to learn more about ABC; come, participate, be inspired, make a difference!

Peter & Nancy Jeton of Andover



Students grow talents, volunteer

All three seniors are hard at work on college applications, working with their ABC college mentors and pro-bono college coach Julie Ireland Childs of Collegebound USA to hone their essays and applications. All have made early-action applications.

Fatouma Koné has a retail sales position at the popular downtown boutique, NEST. She also is gearing up for basketball season.

Xonatia Lee is working in child care and education at The Kids Club in Andover, part of the SHED Children's Campus.

Ariel Leachman is president of the Student Mentor program at AHS. She is also an editorial intern with *Apple Sauce Literary Magazine*, published by the non-profit CREST for the Greater Merrimack Valley.

A'mari Bing-Way, one of two juniors, has found her passion in art and is taking advantage of classes at Essex Art Center, including Photoshop and Creative Digital Media. She is also participating in the Junior Volunteer program at the MSPCA Nevin's Farm, with plans to join the regular volunteer program once she turns 16.

Nilda Vega is beginning her second year as a member of the highly selective Schola Choir, the most advanced group of the Treble Chorus of New England. She also is pursuing volunteer opportunities at Lawrence General Hospital.

Sophomore **Déanna Clarke-Campbell** and 9th-graders **Elise Cabrera** and **Jenni Nguyen** also became involved quickly in extracurricular activities. For details, see the "Incoming students" inside.