

Scholars give back to their supporters

The life-changing benefits that the Andover community extends to A Better Chance scholars are obvious. But the contributions the students make to their hosts are less well known.

This school year, ABC students are giving back to the community by

- Joining other teens to form a new charitable program
- Volunteering at a Lawrence health center
- Assisting at an after-school program for children
- Mentoring younger students [see Fall 2009 newsletter at AndoverABC.com]
- Helping at an exercise studio

Lending a helping hand at the studio is junior Henrica Bresil under a new work/study scholarship offered by Kismet Yoga Studio in Ballardvale. By working there, she gains time-management and other skills she will need in college and beyond.

Studio owner Tom Quinlan says that "Henrica has matured in her stay here. She has improved on her already strong work ethic and customers love her."

Henrica also is involved in the new Andover Interact Club. When Bill Buck, president of the Andover Rotary Club, wanted to start the Rotary teen affiliate, he connected with Andover ABC. Henrica accepted the chance to be president, while sophomore Shanygne Askins is the treasurer. Shanygne's motive is simple: "I want to see the smile on people's faces after we have helped them." Initially the club is raising funds for earthquake survivors in Haiti and helping Neighbors in Need at its local distribution warehouse.

"These girls will have great role models – Rotarians and



ABC scholars joined in when the Bilazarian family hosted a dinner reception supporting ABC. From left are host Melanie Bilazarian, Thaline Bilazarian, Khaneisha White, Dareé Colón, Ani Bilazarian, Justene Salomon, Emma Bilazarian and Henrica Bresil.

professionals – from whom they will learn critical skills: establishing goals, determining action steps, achieving goals," Buck said.

At the Greater Lawrence Family Health Center, Dareé Colón, a junior with a pre-med focus, is an intern working with young female adolescents during and after school in the Healthy Living workshop.

Back in Andover, senior Justene Salomon, 9th-grader Laura Molina and Shanygne have taken turns volunteering at the SHED after-school program for very young students....(continued inside)

President's message: Everyone benefits



Amy D. Joyall

We are excited to highlight the generosity of our community members and their gifts of time and talents in this issue. Our scholars also set an example for learning outside the classroom through community service.

Read on and take pride in the work done and in the rich partnerships that have translated into learning opportunities to nourish the promise and ambition that each ABC scholar brings to Andover.

While rich in resources, we continue to face the challenges like so many other non-profits. The cost of maintaining the ABC house, feeding our scholars and funding enrichment activities continues to surge. Our economy has placed unexpected burdens on many and we are feeling the effects.

We would like to spread the word about Andover ABC and our donor base. You can help....(continued inside)

A class of their own

Go Girls! curriculum takes off

Self-esteem is not something that Justene Salomon lacks.

This is according to the Andover High School senior herself and whole-heartedly affirmed by Aixa de Kelley, AHS head of Counseling.

“Self-esteem is not complicated,” Justene states in her signature straightforward manner. “You have it. You don’t, in which case you build it.”

The ABC student has taken that message to heart by choosing as a senior exhibition project to create a curriculum designed to build 7th- and 8th-grade girls’ self-esteem.

Justene wanted to focus on self-esteem because it dovetails with her career interest in counseling. For a project collaborator – a friend with similar interests – she asked Krista Saia. The two seniors approached de Kelley, who was happy to supervise. The girls then proposed to Judy Pioulenek, counselor at West Middle School, that they design small group workshops for girls focusing on self-esteem. Pioulenek signed on.

Bolstered by research and guidance from de Kelley over the past few months, the two seniors have created the Go Girls! Curriculum. Now under way, it provides for up to 10 modules on topics such as Identity Formation, Media Literacy, Healthy Habits, and Bullying, both cyber and physical, plus a materials list, curriculum plan and concluding discussion.

“We left a few sessions open to choose topics that the girls are interested in,” Justene says. “We will also have a box where the students can put in anonymous questions and we will answer these questions a few weeks into the workshops, once we have built a foundation of trust.”

Justene says she and Krista may share high self-esteem but they acquired it through very different routes. Krista is an Andoverite, West Middle school alumni, cheerleader and sports-oriented student, while Justene is a newcomer to Andover and more of the “community-service type.” [See “Praised on TV”] Despite their differences, Justene says that they complement each other well.

Looking ahead to the curriculum’s impact on the middle-school girls, Justene says, “I hope they feel that we have helped them.”

She also believes firmly in the Big Sister/Little Sister mentoring model and feels that this program can be designed to provide similar benefits, such as encouraging candid discussions.

For that reason, she adds, “I’d like to see the sessions happen every year but not necessarily as an AHS-sponsored program, but more like we would tap some [high school] girls that we think would be interested in it and we’ll hand down the curriculum for them to use the next year.

“I hope we can be the big sisters to these girls.”

Praised on TV

Senior Justene Salomon is profiled on WCVB Ch. 5 in its “A+” series on outstanding Boston-area students. Emerging from several family tragedies early in life, she made the life-changing decision to come to Andover High through A Better Chance, and is an honors student today. View the TV segment at our website, www.AndoverABC.org under News.

'Many awesome opportunities'



By Dareé Colón

[Note: We asked junior Dareé Colón to describe her activities outside class. –Ed.]

As scholars in A Better Chance, we all learn how important it is to be involved in different extracurricular activities, not just because it is important for applying to college but because being involved keeps you active doing something that you truly enjoy.

We scholars also learn that trying new activities provides us with great new experiences and enriches our lives.

All of this is why I choose to participate in a variety of activities.

This year, as I lost my position on the Andover High School volleyball team, I realized that when one door closes ten more open. With some help from the ABC program's Enrichment Committee I started some great new activities:

- ...Taking weekly guitar lessons with a music teacher at Phillips Academy
- ...Joining Andover High School Interact Club, a branch of the Andover Rotary (the international volunteer service group)
- ...Winning a seat on the Andover Youth Council, a group of Andover High students that helps Andover Youth Services run great programs for local kids
- ...Volunteering at the Greater Lawrence Family Health Center, where I help run a health-awareness program for girls aged 9-12
- ...Serving as one of two student on the School Council, a collaboration of school administrators, parents, teachers and students that reviews and improves school policies and other issues

Staying involved keeps me focused and helps me manage my time. I really enjoy being active and involved in a range of activities. I am grateful that, through Andover ABC, I have so many awesome opportunities at my fingertips.



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President's message: (Continued from page 1)

After reading this newsletter, don't toss it in the recycle bin. Please pass it on to a neighbor, colleague or anyone you know who is not familiar with this program, and please ask them to do the same. Together, we can keep this Andover jewel thriving for generations to come.

As Lynn Eikenberry of our Board of Directors puts it so beautifully, we supporters of ABC "reap much more than we sow." I am sincerely grateful to all who have nurtured this program. My deepest respect goes to the ABC scholars, who leave their homes and bring us their stories, gifts and insatiable appetites for knowledge and personal growth. We are richer because of them.



Scholars give back continued from page 1

For the community's part, local families are hosts to the ABC scholars, other volunteers introduce them to new and enriching experiences, and religious groups and other organizations provide resources that enable the program to succeed year after year.

The Paige Conservatory of Dance in North Andover, for example, is helping freshman Felicia Reyes to hone her ballet skills.

The YMCA provides free memberships for the ABC scholars each year.

The scholars also are involved with nearby Phillips Academy, a longtime program supporter that provides ABC girls with Phillips ID cards and keeps them in the loop on events and happenings on campus.

Andover residents also play an important role. Seth and Melanie

Bilazarian and their daughters, for instance, have actively supported Andover ABC since they moved near the ABC house three years ago. In February they opened up their home for a memorable night of cocktails and dinner, raising funds and visibility for the program.

Some of the most gratifying connections are made by the ABC tutors. Among the volunteer tutors are Martha Grant, a former math teacher, and Bruce Letwin, a retired Bio Tech scientist who helps students with chemistry and Earth science.

The community supports are diverse, but the experience is universal: the people and organizations that sustain ABC in today's difficult economy say that they reap much more than they sow in this mutually beneficial relationship.



Gov. Deval Patrick, an ABC scholar while in prep school, talked with four local ABC scholars during a visit to Andover earlier this year. He is shown with (from left) seniors Camilla Ekokobe and Justene Salomon, junior Henrica Bresil and 9th-grader Felicia Reyes.

Grads & Newcomers

The two ABC scholars graduating from Andover High School plan to get their college education at two challenging institutions in New England.

Graduating senior Camilla Ekokobe has decided to enter Wheaton College in Norton, Mass., with a major scholarship. She also received acceptances from Eckerd, Goucher and Rollins colleges, Sacred Heart University and U. of Tampa.

Her classmate, Justene Salomon, chose Sacred Heart University in Fairfield, Conn. Merrimack College, Long Island University's C.W. Post Campus and Adelphi University also accepted her applications.

Taking their places at Andover ABC next fall will be two students from Connecticut. Jazzare Mays of New Haven and Abigail Awodele of Bridgeport will enter 9th grade at Andover High.

New Website

Get the latest news about Andover A Better Chance, learn more about our goals and see how you can get involved - all at our new website, www.AndoverABC.org. Renée Sando Ornes volunteered her time and design talents in creating the site.

Coming events

- ABC Yard Sale - 8am - 1pm, Sat., May 22, 57 Chestnut St. *Rain date: Sun., May 23*
- ABC Open House - 1-3pm, Sun., May 23, 134 Main St.

Support Andover A Better Chance:
Box 212, Andover, MA 01810



Alumna profile: Anita Palmer-Pace, '79



Anita Palmer-Pace came to Andover A Better Chance as a young, impressionable 14-year-old. She graduated from Andover High School in 1979 with a new-found passion to educate and give back to underprivileged young people of color like herself.

Today, as Office Supervisor in Vanderbilt University's financial-aid department, she attributes that life-changing transition to the ABC program and members of the Andover community who supported her.

"It takes a village to raise a child." is the mantra she lives by. Back in her native Nashville, Tennessee, her mother and her father, a Baptist minister, taught her the importance of a quality education and helping **all** people.

While she and her husband, Tony, attended Trinity College, they became resident directors at the A Better Chance house in nearby Simsbury, Conn., where they lived and mentored nine young men from New York City.

Graduating from Trinity in 1983 with a BA in sociology, she was hired by Vanderbilt University. She enjoys mentoring college students and supporting their parents with the uneasy transition from high school to college. She also refers to herself as the "host parent" on campus to many students and shows her gratitude to ABC by mentoring other ABC graduates that attend Vanderbilt.

She is proud of the accomplishments and aspirations of her two daughters. Jillian, 22, is a customer service representative at T-Mobile, and Jessica, 18, is a sophomore about to transfer to Cumberland University on a full basketball scholarship.

"Both girls are the pride and joy of our lives," she says.

Anita still maintains close relationships with the Andover families that supported her while at ABC. Margot Bixby's influence may have saved Anita's life. Anita knew Margot when she successfully battled breast cancer. She was impressed by Margot's faith and courage and the love she and her family shared. At the age of 35, Anita was also diagnosed with breast cancer. She is grateful that she was able to learn from Margot's experience and is convinced that education, early detection and family support saved her life.

David and Linda Corbett were host family for her husband Tony, who also is an ABC alum. They now fill in as grandparents to her daughters, who refer to David and Linda as "ABC Grandfather Sir" and "Gigi."

"I still stay with them [in Boston] whenever I come in for a visit," Anita says proudly. "We **are** family."

She even learned how to dance in Andover. ABC host Doug Mitchell taught her the two-step and the waltz.

Anita continues to give back and is very involved in her church and her community. She is a board member for a Nashville charity, Be a Helping Hand Foundation. The nonprofit organization is designed to teach trade skills as well as to provide direction, job search and placement for young men and women in the inner city to support themselves and also their families.

Anita compares her experience at ABC to Helping Hand. "We train these young people through the opportunity of education, which is what ABC did for me."

Anita's message to the students currently attending ABC: "Take full advantage, be strong, be proud. There is never an end to what you can achieve."



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