

# Student experience

Students enter the Andover A Better Chance program with hopeful anxiety about what awaits them here. Four years later, they graduate feeling well prepared to take on life's challenges... and succeed.

Resident assistant Amber Edwards, who has been on the front lines of these young women's lives at Andover ABC for two years, calls the A Better Chance scholar's journey: a coming-of-age experience.

"It's achieving academic goals but also integrating into a new social structure," she says of these transfers from underperforming city schools. "It's like a new society and they are learning how to navigate it."

This process of "social and academic immersion" has produced 127 Andover ABC graduates since its 1967 founding, many of whom are now working as doctors, scientists, educators, admissions directors and researchers.

The ABC scholar begins her journey with a rigorous admissions process, initially with ABC's national office, followed by a second round to gain admittance to individual programs, such as Andover ABC.

The newly minted ABC scholar arrives in the fall for orientation—a primer on the culture she will join in a town in which she becomes, for possibly the first time in her life, a minority in a majority culture. She attends Andover High School in which learning and achievement are the norm. She is surrounded by peers with similar academic dreams, adults with high standards of academic and behavioral conduct, and staff that provide consistent social and academic support.

An initial challenge is dorm life. "At first it was really hard to live



The Cadet family of Andover are hosting ABC freshman Abigail Awodele (2nd from left).

with so many different people," admits freshman Abigail Awodele. "I studied each girl and how they respond and how they do stuff. And I figured out the best way to fit in... sort of like a missing piece." Abigail agrees that this new skill will help her in college and beyond.

The next major adjustment usually is to the academic rigor of AHS. ABC scholars often find themselves lagging in subjects, particularly math and science. For them ABC offers a focused ramp-up program.

Whenever possible the scholars are required to take advanced-placement to prepare them better for college.

Andover High often stands in striking contrast to their former neighborhood school system. As Abigail notes, "In my school in Bridgeport, CT, there was always a fight." Jazzare Mays, also a freshman, adds that, in New Haven, she would be going to a school of predominantly minority students. Coming to AHS, she says, "I bring diversity and I get diversity." ....(continued inside)

## President's message: Everyone benefits



Mary E. Pritchard

When asked in a recent interview what advice he would give to current A Better Chance scholars and fellow alums, Gov. Deval Patrick responded simply, "pass it on." (Patrick, an ABC alumnus, is donating a portion of his new memoir, *A Reason to Believe*, to the national ABC program.)

Many ABC alums have done just that. Chandra Brown, Andover ABC class of '90, is a shining example of an ABC scholar who turned her top-flight education into

a career improving educational opportunities in minority neighborhoods. (See Back page article inside.)

Chandra's career mirrors that of her Andover host family, Dr. Thomas Sharkey, interim principal of Andover High School, and his wife, Eileen, a retired North Andover elementary school teacher. Chandra, now a principal, too, is in the midst of turning around the lowest performing elementary school in the state of Maryland. The Sharkeys had a ....(continued inside)

## President's message:

(Continued from page 1)

clearly absorbed what AHS and her host family had to offer her . . . and passed it on.

When I look at our two current seniors, Dareé Colon and Henrica Bresil, I see that same extraordinary future path that will, no doubt, result in both "passing it on."

Admission officers want to see risk takers, students who are actively engaged in their schools and community. Most importantly, they want to see students "giving back." Throughout their four years in Andover, Henrica and Dareé have been risk-takers. The biggest risk of all was to leave the comfort and security of their home for the chance at a better education. Their risk-taking continued once they arrived in Andover.

This spring we will celebrate the impressive journeys of these two seniors as they traveled through the Andover ABC program. It's a tale of two very different journeys that, to each, has made all the difference.

Dareé tapped into her considerable leadership potential and ended up on numerous leadership councils, including AHS School Council, Andover Youth Council, Peer Mediation Board, Senior Board and Student Ambassador Program.

In addition, Dareé volunteered for a year at the Greater Lawrence Family Health Clinic's after-school public health

tremendous impact on Chandra's life and Chandra

rower. (See Henrica's own account in the article below) Testing herself physically and mentally, Henrica spent two summers in the Outward Bound program. She found herself doing things she never dreamed of, including tenting alone with a bear nearby. What sums up Henrica is her willingness and desire to try new things, whether it's pushing the ABC household to do the Walk for Hunger in Boston or recently taking part in the Not for Sale – Anti Human Trafficking Walk.

Henrica and Dareé have exactly what it takes to be leaders in their communities; to fulfill the mission of being an ABC scholar. I have no doubt that in the future, we will be writing columns in our newsletter describing their life work and their commitment to "passing it on."

*Mary E. Pittman*

## ★ Bresil Looks Back ★

*By Henrica Bresil*



As I reflect on my time spent with Andover A Better Chance, I realize that I made the right choice in packing up at age 13 and following the educational opportunity I knew I deserved. With that opportunity came the people, experiences and growth that I have come to associate with one of the best times of my life.

A coveted experience of mine has been the Martial Arts Club I started with a group of friends during my freshman year. We never expected the interest it generated, The various students I have had the chance to meet and teach has been inexplicably gratifying.

I had the pleasure of discovering rowing; the challenging, time-consuming athletic experience that I have come to love. I don't know where I'd be without it, and the limits it's pushed me to.

Some of my closest friends have come from my experience here in Andover. And to think that I might have never known them had I made a different decision four years ago scares me a bit.

I've had the chance to live with brilliant, amazing, ambitious girls, to call them my sisters, to create relationships, and experience some of the best times I've had thus far in my life. I have developed my sense of self and my independence as an A Better Chance scholar.

Needless to say, Andover will always be more than a town to me; it was an experience.



ABC senior Henrica Bresil (center) takes off amid more than 100 runners and walkers at the start of the first Andover ABC 5K race.

program. The doctor with whom she worked was so impressed with Dareé that she asked her to join a group facilitator training program called Junior Youth Spiritual Empowerment Program. Now Dareé is leading her own girls group in Lawrence to help tweens and teens feel empowered to make a difference in their own lives and communities.

Henrica arrived determined to make her mark. When she discovered in her first year that AHS did not have a martial arts club, she started the Tae Kwon Do club, which is ongoing today. Next she moved to the completely new world of crew and quickly rose from novice to varsity

## Samuel S. Rogers Prize Awarded

Graduating senior Dareé Colon will receive the first annual Samuel S. Rogers Prize for Volunteerism. The prize was created by the Stevens Foundation, a generous supporter of Andover ABC, to honor foundation leader Sam Rogers, an ABC founder, board president and host parent. Rogers passed in 2010. The award honors someone who has set a high standard of volunteer service. Colon has been a dedicated volunteer throughout her four years (see president's letter). "I do these things because it is something I like to do, but it is awesome to be recognized" said Colon.





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## Student Experience continued from page 1

Scholars are required to participate in a sport or to choose a variety of programs that keep them engaged in AHS and the community after school most days of the week such as varsity crew, Drama Guild, color guard, local ballet and jazz dance classes. They also volunteer time with Andover Youth Services, the Greater Lawrence Family Health Center and other community groups.

Back at the ABC residence, the scholars meet five nights a week for a family-style dinner with house staff. After dinner dishes are done, scholars must participate in formal study hours. The three resident assistants and members of the community volunteer to tutor in more challenging subjects.

As with all suburban teens, weekends are filled with chores, TV (which is prohibited during the week), homework and social events. On an April weekend the scholars organized a 5K run/walk that raised nearly \$3,000 for ABC and the Japanese Red Cross.

One night a week and one weekend a month, each scholar is on her own to spend time with her host family, a local family that has shown a keen

interest in the ABC program. "This is a place where we can go to be individuals," explained senior Dareé Colon. "It's somewhere just for me."

For summer ABC works with each student to find, and often fund, experiences to supplement their academic and social growth. These have ranged from writing workshops in New York City to Outward Bound trips.

A scholar leaves Andover ABC and AHS with the education and tools to succeed in a wide range of environments. "These students experience areas of real growth while attending AHS: how to advocate for themselves, how to get help, how to navigate a large institutional system," notes Sally O'Rourke, AHS counselor and past ABC resident director.

Equally integral to future success, they understand how to navigate diverse human relationships. "These girls start clubs, rise to leadership roles here and they move easily between groups at AHS," she adds.

Senior Dareé Colon says proudly that she will graduate with a sense of "extreme independence."

## First 5K For ABC

The A Better Chance scholars in April sponsored a 5K race for the public that was so successful that they plan to make it an annual event.

The race attracted 120 runners and walkers on a bright, warm Sunday morning to the 5-kilometer course along downtown

streets. It raised about \$3,000 to benefit Andover ABC and the Red Cross relief work in Japan.

The students planned and presented the event under the leadership of Aiko Onishi, an Andover ABC director and Pike school teacher who was pleased by the results.

## Needs

Andover ABC is in need of several household items. If you have something on this list that is second-hand and no longer needed, please consider donating it. To make arrangements, please contact Susan Connally at [seconn@bellsouth.net](mailto:seconn@bellsouth.net)

- Garbage disposal for kitchen sink
- Vacuum – canister style with hoses, attachments
- Shop vac – for messy projects
- Tools
- Masonry blocks, masonry cement
- Power washer
- Clothes washer (less than 10 years old)
- Clothes dryer (less than 10 years old)

## Colleges

Andover ABC's two graduating seniors have reached the pinnacle of their Andover experience by choosing their colleges.

Henrica Bresil was awarded a full tuition scholarship from the Providence College.

Dareé Colon has decided to enter Clark University in the fall. Colon was awarded over \$39,000.00 worth of financial aid from Clark University.

Both enrolled in Andover High School four years ago through the ABC program in hopes that the opportunity would help them get a top-quality college education and prepare them to join the ranks of tomorrow's leaders.

Support Andover A Better Chance:  
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# Chandra Brown *By Liz Petersen*

Born and raised in the South Bronx in New York City, Chandra Brown wanted to explore a different way of life. Already excelling in school, she was ready for a new challenge when she came to Andover's ABC program in 1987. Today, she takes on an even greater challenge: transforming the Thomas Claggett Elementary school in Maryland, the lowest performing elementary school in the state, at the time she took over as Principal in 2008.

A member of the AHS class of 1990, Chandra went on to Barnard College from where she received a degree in psychology and a minor in education. Tragically, her mother became terminally ill and Chandra spent several years caring for her until she passed away. She began her career as a daycare teacher in Maryland. During her 8 years at Carrollton Elementary School she earned her Masters degree in Education in Reading from Bowie State University. She took a job at Port Towns Elementary School as a reading specialist. Chandra then earned an Administration Certificate from New Leaders for New Schools, a prestigious certificate program designed to turn educators into outstanding principals of urban public schools. In 2008, she was appointed Principal of Thomas Claggett Elementary School in District Heights, Md. Chandra's mission remained steady throughout her career: "All the schools I have worked in have been Title I, serving children from low socio-economic backgrounds."

Chandra attributes her success to her experience while at ABC and the influence of her host family. "I am who I am because of the overall experience," she affirmed. That host family was the Sharkeys, a family of five-- Tom, Eileen, Patrick, Kevin and Brendan, who became involved in ABC to experience more diversity in their lives. Today, their bond has no boundaries. Chandra remembers; "When my mother died, the Sharkeys drove all way to New York to see me to make sure I was OK." It was clear they have a very



Principal Chandra Brown shares lunchtime with students at the improving Thomas Claggett Elementary School in Maryland.

special relationship. "I feel that my host family was a "perfect match". They were very approachable, easy going and a lot of fun," she reflects. Her host parents' drive to make a difference in the lives of children directly influenced Chandra. Tom Sharkey was principal of Billerica High School and Eileen Sharkey was an elementary school reading teacher in North Andover. Tom recalls, "I remember Channie watching Eileen doing her lesson plans." Chandra concludes, "I did not leave Andover with the inspiration to become an educator, but, as I continued through life and these opportunities continued to present themselves, I used the lessons I learned from the Sharkeys as well as my desire to touch urban youth, like myself, in a positive way to influence my professional decisions."



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