

'Posse' approach smooths ride toward college

The Andover A Better Chance "posse" swings into action every school day at Andover High before the First Block bell rings at 7:45AM.

After the scramble of too-early alarms, elusive binders and books, and brisk walks in unpredictable New England weather to the bus stop, these Andover ABC scholars usually gather at a table in the cafeteria. They grab a quick breakfast and, more importantly, touch base, share a laugh and reestablish the invisible threads of connectedness that bolster each young woman as she heads off, solo, to tackle the day.



This group of eight young women from ABC's oldest community school program in the nation closely mimics other young groups of minority students that benefit from an organization in the news lately, the Posse Foundation.

The nonprofit Posse Foundation was created in 1988 by educator Deborah Bial. She recalled running into a student of hers who said he had dropped out of college but explained that he would have stayed if he had had his "posse" with him.

Out of this sprung an organization that has sent more than 4,000 inner-city youth to top-tier colleges and universities.

The model, similar to Andover ABC's, is based on the notion that bringing together a small group of talented students, carefully selected and given the right training and supports, powerfully leverages the positive forces of peer connection to ensure each individual's academic(continued inside)

Learning after school

What have the scholars of Andover A Better Chance been doing besides studies? You name it – sports, the arts, volunteering to local causes, intern work – and they probably have done it.

Freshman Fatouma Koné won a spot on the 9th-grade girls basketball team, playing at power forward. The team had a winning season and Fatouma finished strong. She is now co-captain of the 9th-grade girls lacrosse team.

Fatouma and **freshman Xonatia Lee** are participating in "Today's Students, Tomorrow's

Teachers," a Lexington-based program to recruit, mentor and place economically challenged and culturally diverse high school students in college and on to employment as teachers and leaders who will inspire and strengthen their communities. In recent presentations to community leaders, Fatouma and Xonatia were extremely effective in engaging the group in meaningful dialogue. They also participated in a number of workshops at Boston College's School of Education.

Sophomore Abbi Awodele was chosen for the highly selective Andover High "Spotlight" Chamber Choir. The choir performed at the annual Holiday Peace Concert at the Tsongas Arena...(continued inside)

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and social success while fostering greater understanding of diversity within the community. Biel has won a MacArthur Genius Award for her approach to increasing educational access.

With the Andover ABC model, a diverse group of students also is rigorously selected and placed together. They get extensive support from caring tutors, school counselors, host families, ABC staff, and board members to face the challenges of living away from home and attending an academically rigorous high school. It has been successfully harnessing the power of this strategy since the first class of young men entered the ABC house in 1967.

"At school we don't usually see each other," explains sophomore Abigail (Abbi) Awodele. "But at breakfast we all sit together at the table and laugh and bond together. We'll eat lunch with each other if we share a break, but usually only two of us are around."

"The high school would be a different place if I was not with these girls," states sophomore Deanna Starr.

The fortifying effects of the group play out in all areas of their lives; when it is time to hit the books, for instance. "We are all in the study room," Deanna relates, "and I might say, 'Does this essay sound right?' I am definitely not a writer, so I say this a lot!"

President's message

Dear Friends,

I don't need to give you a lengthy report in this issue on the current state of Andover A Better Chance. The "Learning after school" article on page 1 paints a picture of young women eager for opportunity. The way they have thrown themselves into this year has been completely inspiring.

We welcomed four new scholars this year, and the first two months, to be frank, were rough for all of us. The newcomers had to adapt and learn so much about so many things. But once these freshmen began to get involved at the high school – learning how to harness the academic support available to them, following the cues and drawing on the energy of our high-achieving ABC upper-class scholars – they took off.

This has turned into one of the most exciting years at ABC in a long time. Our students aren't just breaking GPA records for ABC House, they are breaking boundaries athletically, socially, in service and in the community.

They are rewriting the story of what is possible here at A Better Chance.



Mary E. Pritchard

Mary E. Pritchard

★ From tears to awareness ★



Monique Lopez Espinoza

By Monique Lopez Espinoza

My first day at Andover High School, I cried my eyes out. That day, in my mind, was the end of the world. I couldn't fathom why I had left the comfortable familiarity of home and put myself in a place where I knew nobody and I didn't belong. My thoughts had been consumed by loneliness. The feeling of loneliness can strike a person so suddenly and have a destructive effect in their thoughts. That

feeling made it difficult for me to remember the reason I was at Andover High School, crying my eyes out in the bathroom.

My point is: I forgot something, something an ABC scholar should never forget. I forgot that, as an ABC scholar, I was there to create a better future for myself. Looking back now, I can laugh at how silly I was; but more so, I can recognize the fact that, in that moment, I was growing up.

A Better Chance is praised for improving the educational conditions for brilliant students of color. As proud as I am to represent a program so grand, I can't help but be even prouder that I am a part of what ABC is less recognized for. As well as improving the educational lives of its students, ABC gives its students the power to use and recognize their abilities – and even cause them to attain new ones.

I now have the ability to think for myself. I can now recognize if I'm making a decision for myself, or if it has been tampered with by an outside force. I now recognize my amazing ability to adapt; never again will I be held back by the fear of not belonging.

Thanks to ABC I now possess the incredible and powerful ability to accept. Accepting circumstances, loneliness, failures, triumphs, the amazing and the completely horrid is something I am able to do with ease and understanding. Most mind-boggling, however, is that after four years of searching for who to be, what to accomplish, who to make proud, I have learned to accept myself.

I can never find the words to convey how life-changing this wonderful program is. The opportunities I have been given, and the wonderful people I have had the privilege to meet during my time at Andover ABC, will never cease to be in my memory. After four years in the ABC program I am proud to say, I am strong in my beliefs, I have discovered who I am, and I know what I want.



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Learning after school continued from page 1

before the Lowell-Mass vs. Boston College game and more recently at the Show Choir National Championships in New York City at which Andover placed second. She is taking voice lessons, too. Abbi also spends Fridays volunteering at Lawrence General Hospital as a front desk greeter as well as the American Red Cross, and has sharpened her public speaking skills as a member of the AHS Debate Club.

Sophomore Jazzare Mays and **freshmen Xonatia Lee** and **Ariel Leachman** ran on the winter track team. Xonatia and Ariel have continued with spring track. Xonatia recently posted a new personal best time in the 100-yard dash and is on the cusp of achieving a mark in the 200-yard dash that would move her up to varsity as a freshman.

Sophomore Deanna Starr joined the fall crew team and kept in shape this winter participating in rigorous winter-crew conditioning program held at Brooks School. This spring she is on the track team.

Junior Felicia Reyes volunteered this winter at Esperanza Academy in Lawrence. She had worked there as an intern last summer and was so beloved by the students that the director invited her back to mentor and tutor middle-school girls. She is also very excited about a modeling program she participates in at Lawrence High School. Felicia also works for a local computer software company doing data input and telephone sales and marketing. She is very busy with SAT prep courses and toured colleges with her host family over April vacation. Dance was on the docket this winter and spring as **Felicia** and **Xonatia** continued ballet lessons. Meanwhile, **Ariel** studied modern dance and **Jazzare** took hip hop classes.

Senior Monique Lopez Espinoza has volunteered at MSPCA this past winter and currently works at Andolini's Italian Restaurant in Andover center, along with fellow scholars **Felicia** and **Ariel**.

The eight did all that and also averaged a 3.9 weighted GPA for the quarter!

College News

Graduating senior **Monique Lopez Espinoza** will enter California State University, Fullerton this fall, heading back to her roots near Garden Grove, CA.

Monique was accepted by all but one of the 10 colleges to which she applied. Judging from her outstanding performance, she undoubtedly will go on to exemplify the can-do spirit and dedication to academic achievement that she embraced as an ABC scholar.

Congratulations, Monique!

Needs list

Andover ABC always needs household supplies and tools. If you would like to donate one of the following items, new or used, please tell Susan Connolly at seconn@bellsouth.net.

- Perennial plants (e.g. from thinning your ivy, daylilies or hosta patch)
- Household repair tools (e.g. wrench, circular saw, rotary tool)
- Vacuum – canister-style with hoses, attachments
- Masonry blocks, masonry cement, paver blocks, crushed stone
- Insulation batting or boards
- Gas stove

Thanks to Steve and Cornelia Beliveau and Sarah Lupfer for their donations in response to our previous Needs List.

Support Andover A Better Chance:
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Shown outside the ABC house are (front, l-r) Deanna Starr, Jazzare Mays, Abigail Awodele, Monique Lopez Espinoza, Xonatia Lee and (back row) Fatouma Koné, Resident Director Audra Reilly, Felicia Reyes and Ariel Leachman

ABC Booster: Dick Collins

“Over 40 years ago, a group of outstanding Andover citizens started a program in town to assist minority students in advancing their educations and their lives at a time when many sections of our country still put down and discriminated against African-Americans.

The early participants were excellent students, outstanding human beings and, in a few cases, fine athletes as well. Van DeBose, Leon Sharpe and Ellis Rowe, just to name three, stood out, along with others.

They succeeded in everything they undertook, particularly in their studies and fitting into the community. For a number of them, this included athletics.

These young men, as well as the young women who followed, were and are the greatest! Andover has benefitted extensively from their presence with us and continues to do so with the current group of ABC students.

What a great experience it all has been, and what a tremendous blessing ABC has been to all of us!”

- Dick Collins, School Committee member and former AHS coach



Farewell Audra

With great appreciation and admiration, Andover A Better Chance bids a fond farewell to Resident Director Audra Reilly and her family.

Audra joined our program three years ago, looking for an opportunity to apply her passion for helping teen-aged girls to find their voices and succeed academically.

She did just that and much more during her time at ABC, overseeing sweeping program improvements and ushering in an era of academic and personal excellence. Most importantly, Audra guided our ABC scholars as a trusted friend, a tireless advocate, a warm and wise confidant, and beacon of unflagging support.

Audra has faced the many challenges of overseeing student life with equanimity, humor, courage and resilience. We could imagine no better role model for the young women who enter the blue door at 134 Main Street.

Audra will receive her Master's in Education from Lesley University this spring and hopes to teach middle school or high school English in or near Andover in the fall.

She plans to remain involved in the ABC program and in the lives of the young women whom she has touched so deeply.

We wish Audra and sons Noah and Jake all the best!

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Since our last newsletter, the following organizations have contributed goods and services to our program. Thanks for your support!

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