

## Program makes college dream a reality

**Pathways prepares students for work ahead**

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Angela Whiteneck wants to be a lawyer when she grows up.

"I like to help people," she said. "I like to argue too, but in a good way."

Her penchant for expressing herself and getting her point across led Whiteneck to take Introduction to Law and Business Law during her sophomore year at Barringer High School. The experience has percolated her interest in the law, which has led to a short list of colleges that she will apply to next year.

She also knows that colleges are looking for more than good grades. Whiteneck can count the speech team, student council, knitting club and drama club among her extra-curricular activities.

"I also play golf for Barringer and I'm on the bowling team," she said.

With the first half of her junior year near completed, Whiteneck is leaning toward Smith University in Massachusetts, but also has an eye toward Howard University, Columbia University and Rutgers University-New Brunswick. When the time comes to fill out the applications and make a decision, her hard work -- along with the support of parents, teachers and classmates -- will present a clearer, more defined path.

"Without Pathways, I would not be as aware of the college process as I am now," she said.

Pathways to College is a program designed to take the dream of college and crystallize it into a reality for students who think they do not have the resources or pedigree to gain admission. Since the program's inception in 1991, close to 600 students have gone to college through Pathways.

Included with the program is a booklet or "explorer's guide" that serves as a blueprint for a successful application process. The first message in the blueprint encourages students to consider who they are as people and figure out which of the six methods of learning they fall under; visual/spatial, intrapersonal, bodily/kinesthetic, interpersonal, musical/rhythmic and naturalist.

The guide then provides students with other keys necessary to success, including the importance of listening and interpreting information, tricks on how to improve memory and vocabulary.

"They need a 3.0 grade point average to stay in the program," said Ursula Whitehurst, a Pathways instructor and math teacher at Barringer. "No exceptions."

Teachers and mentors share personal experiences, take students on college tours and bring representatives from universities into Newark to expose the students to as much information as possible.

The program also helps students deal with college-related anxieties, such as transition from high school to college, scholarship requirements, internships, housing for married students or those with children, what a week's worth of work looks and feels like and the Scholastic Aptitude Test.

"A test score cannot keep you from doing what you want to do for the rest of your life," Griffin said.

Griffin is the "mother" of Pathways and has been working to place underserved children into college for years. She began with A Better Chance, a program that took economically disadvantaged children from urban enclaves and placed them in day schools, boarding schools and exceptional public schools. The work served some students, but Griffin saw others who would not be able to relocate to other cities or states.

"We needed to do something for the kids who didn't get placed with Better Chance," she said.

In 1991, while living in Boston, Griffin began hosting Pathways meetings at Arts High School, thinking a space for 30 students would be sufficient. When 79 students from all over the city walked in and found space on window sills, the floor and wherever else they could fit, her beliefs about Newark's youth were confirmed.

"I needed help," she said. "We moved from a classroom to the auditorium and kids from all over the city and Paterson and East Orange just kept coming."

After six months of showing students the path, Griffin called on the Dodge Foundation for financial assistance. After two years, the train ride from Boston wore on her and the program hired someone to fill Griffin's shoes. And the program kept growing.

"If we were serious about doing this, getting money and checking on students grades, we were going to have to work with and through the school system," she said.

Since then, Newark has adopted the program and funds the Weequahic and East Side High School branches, while the Barringer branch is still privately funded. To date, Newark Pathways students have gone on to the College of the Holy Cross, Ohio State University and Rutgers University, among others.

"It helps you break out of the mold and understand that there are other things out there to be than a cop, or in the military, or even something illegal," Brian Arrango said.

Growing up in Newark, Arrango had family and friends who were in the military. His concept of college extended to Essex County College or Rutgers-Newark, and he thought the military was the only route he could take for a college education. A college tour to Massachusetts with Pathways changed his outlook.

"I fell in love with Hampshire at first sight," he said. "It was pretty much the scenery. It's a nice transition to go from a forestry campus to a city, that isn't quite like a city."

After graduating from Barringer in 2005, Arrango packed and headed to Massachusetts and is in the middle of his sophomore year studying alternative medicine. When he grows up, the son of Colombian parents wants to own a cafe, where his special brews will be featured and perhaps his Ph.D. in alternative

medicine will hang in the office.

Since launching and revising the program in Newark, Pine-Bluff, Ark., and Detroit have adopted Pathways programs. In the future, Griffin would like to see Pathways implemented in more school systems across the country so children nationwide will receive the same exposure and opportunities that students like Vernon Scott has.

"I used to be quiet," the 18-year-old senior said. "I'm open now and I try to be a leader."

Scott attends Barringer and isn't comfortable with some of the behaviors and actions exhibited around his school after the final bell rings. For now, he plans to keep working at Applebee's until heading off to college. He hopes to work as a corporate pilot until he turns 45 and then devote his time to changing some of what he sees. Or as the explorer's guide calls it, "Showing Some Love."

"You will see me again," he said.