

SISTERMENTORS

Promoting Education Among Women and Girls of Color

Fall/Winter 2004 Newsletter

A Newsletter for Donors and Friends of SisterMentors

Tech-Savvy Girls: Technology Workshops for Girls of Color

"I feel really smart. I learned a lot about computers today," said 13 year old Abena to another SisterMentors girl at the end of one of SisterMentors' technology workshops. Abena and her friends are middle school girls of color who learned how to build a website in May 2004. Girls, ages 12 to 15, from middle and high schools in Alexandria, Virginia and Prince George's County, Maryland spent part of their Saturdays in computer labs learning HTML ("hypertext markup language"), the computer coding used to create Web pages.

But the workshops did not just stop at HTML. Girls learned to do sophisticated searches for text and images on search engines, copy multiple files simultaneously and execute commands from the keyboard instead of from the pull down menu. They also learned the uses of the left and right clicks on the mouse.



The girls were excited about learning to build a website and expressed their gratitude. "I am just so grateful for you all taking the time to teach us this stuff," said Grace, age 13, at the end of one of the workshops. An unparalleled response came from Roxie, age 15, who threw both hands up in the air and shouted "Wow!" after building her first Web page.

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Celebrating Our New Doctorates

Najat Asaad defended her dissertation in June 2004, making her the nineteenth woman SisterMentors has helped to receive the doctorate since our inception in September 1997. Najat received her doctorate in Social Work from Howard University and plans to teach. She is the mother of two adult children and had returned to school to get her doctorate. Najat remains a strong supporter of SisterMentors.

Codou Diaw defended her dissertation in December 2003, making her SisterMentors' fourth Ph.D. for 2003. Codou received her doctorate from the University of Maryland, Baltimore County in the Education Department's program in Language, Literacy and Culture. Her dissertation is entitled, "Gender and Educational Policies in Senegal: Impact and Prospects for Girls' Education and Women's Literacy." Codou plans to work in education policy-making and advocacy to promote gender responsive education in Sub-Saharan Africa. She is Senegalese and received her undergraduate degree from the Université Cheikh Anta Diop in Dakar, Senegal. Codou continues to mentor SisterMentors girls and do other volunteer work with our program.

From the Executive Director

Dear Donors and Friends:

We are very excited about the work we are doing at SisterMentors. This past school year has certainly been tremendous for us as we expanded our program and took our current activities to a deeper level.

The number of girls for our college visit increased from 12 last year to 26 this year and we visited two colleges instead of one during the girls' spring break. Our girls, especially our seventh graders, were awed by their experience on campus.

As I mentioned in our summer newsletter, the technology workshops for our girls were one of the high points of our program. The girls' enthusiasm and excitement helped make the workshops a success.

In conversations with the girls before our technology workshops we discovered that some used computers infrequently while others used computers primarily for listening to music on the Internet.

Our goal is to get girls more engaged with technology by broadening their computer skills and Internet knowledge to encourage them to consider careers in technology.

Two more women received their doctorates this past academic year, increasing the number to 19 women of color SisterMentors has helped to get the doctorate since September 1997. All of the women in our program are making good progress on their dissertation and some will get their doctorate next year.

We are very pleased and humbled by the results of the first evaluation of our program. The women and girls we serve gave us a very high rating. We are indeed fulfilling our mission to promote education among traditionally disadvantaged communities.

All of our success this year was made possible by your continuing, generous support. It is your donation which helped fund the college visits and the technology workshops for our girls.

Your donation substantially funds our program. You are an integral part of SisterMentors and I cannot thank you enough for your wonderful support and loyalty. Thank you and please continue to support us. Your donation will help us to fund a technology summer camp for our girls where they will continue to learn more about technology.

Last year we received several matching gifts. If your employer or an organization you are affiliated with has a matching gift program, please ask them to match your donation to SisterMentors. Please contact me if you have any questions about matching gifts.

We at SisterMentors remain passionate about, and committed to, the work we do. As always, I encourage you to contact me for any reason. I would be delighted to hear from you. I can be reached at director@sistermentors.org or 202-775-6846.

Thanks again for your support of SisterMentors!



Shireen K. Lewis, Ph.D.



SisterMentors women at work

"SisterMentors are wonderful women who have motivated my daughter to aim for an education beyond her Bachelor's Degree. College has always been a part of my plan for her but a doctoral degree is now part of her plans for herself. Yet, it's not just the women's advanced education that has encouraged my daughter most and endeared them to me but their embrace of my child's uniqueness and their ability to see what a shining star occupies her sphere.

These brilliant professional women have shown her how much like them she is, what talents and interests they share, and how some of their obstacles are the same. Their openness along with mentoring sessions and workshops have proven to my daughter that she is a strong young lady of color who can do anything. SisterMentors are proof of that!"

*Nancy Jairrels
Mother of SisterMentors girl*

Evaluation of SisterMentors Reveals “high degree of satisfaction”

SisterMentors was evaluated for the first time this past winter. The independent evaluation was conducted by two graduate students in the Master’s in Business Administration program at George Washington University in Washington, D.C. as part of their coursework for a class on public administration.

Women and girls in the SisterMentors program, SisterMentors women graduates, parents, volunteers, and collaborators were interviewed and surveyed for this comprehensive evaluation.

The evaluators were supervised by Dr. Kathryn Newcomer, Professor and Chair in the Department of Public Administration at George Washington University. Professor Newcomer is very well respected in her field and has conducted program evaluations for many government agencies both in the U.S. and abroad.

Interviews with the women in SisterMentors revealed “a high degree of satisfaction with the program.” All of the women said participation in SisterMentors improved their chances of getting the doctorate and several graduates stated that they would not have been able to get their doctorate without SisterMentors. All of the women said that they would recommend SisterMentors to other women doctoral candidates of color.

Also, the evaluators reported that “girls are getting the message that they can be successful in a university setting and that school is important to their future.” The girls reported that SisterMentors enhances their value of education. Parents felt that the most important part of the program is the girls’ interaction with women of color role models.

Making It Real: Our Girls Experience College

On April 6 and 7, 2004 our girls experienced two exhilarating days on local university campuses. In collaboration with the Office on Women in Alexandria, Virginia and Thurgood Marshall Middle School in Prince George’s County, Maryland, twenty-six girls of color visited the University of Maryland, College Park and George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia. Some girls were continuing their second year with SisterMentors and were a part of our first college visit last year.

At the request of our girls, we visited two college campuses this year. At both campuses, girls who were 12 to 15 years old in 7th, 8th and 9th grades, listened to presentations by Admissions and Financial Aid officers, dialogued with women of color undergraduates, visited dormitories and had lunch on campus. At the University of Maryland, girls accompanied women to classes and listened to a presentation on academic achievement programs. At George Mason University, the girls had a walking tour of the campus.

OUR DAY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND

Our day at the University of Maryland, College Park was intense and extremely rewarding. We started off with a presentation by two admissions officers who outlined what it takes to get into college. The admissions officers urged the girls to start learning now to manage their

time, be self-motivated, and cultivate good study habits. They encouraged girls to seek out someone who could help them gain good study habits. The girls were also encouraged to do well in Math and English, take Honors and Advanced Placement classes in high school and maintain grades of A’s and B’s.

One of our 9th graders asked about the impact of summer classes since she wants to take a Geometry class in the summer. The admissions officer advised her to take the class. Before wrapping up their presentation, the admissions officers handed out a college application and focused the girls’ attention on several sections.

Girls Dialogue with Women of Color Undergraduates

Immediately after the presentation by admissions officers, girls were greeted by eleven women of color

undergraduates who were hosting them for part of the day. The women were of different racial and ethnic backgrounds and were part of the McNair program for low-income, first generation college students. Each woman took at least two girls under her wing and the girls excitedly accompanied women to their classes including Chemistry, Economics, English, Geology, and American Studies. After class, the women took the girls to see their dormitories.

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Update on SisterMentors Graduate

In our Fall/Winter 2003 Newsletter we celebrated Genevieve Yirenyi's defense of her dissertation, but noted that she had to complete her hospital internship to officially receive her Ph.D. We are happy to report that Genevieve completed her internship and graduated this June.

Genevieve received her doctorate in Clinical Psychology from Pacifica Graduate School of Psychology in California. Her dissertation is on racial socialization and academic success among at-risk minority high school students.

Genevieve was recently awarded a prestigious postdoctoral fellowship at the University of Maryland School of Medicine and begins her fellowship this fall. She is 28 years old.

"As they say, the rest is history. Six months after joining the group I successfully proposed my dissertation topic which had been on 'hold mode' for a year. This simultaneously allowed me to apply to internship, the other critical graduation requirement. Surprisingly, eight months after that breakthrough I successfully completed and defended my entire dissertation. My time with SisterMentors has been invaluable and has included, but not been limited to, support, encouragement, sisterhood, laughs, and community awareness."

Genevieve Yirenyi
SisterMentors 2003 Graduate



Girls building their websites

Tech-Savvy Girls

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"I learned a lot of things at the Technology Workshop. And now I know how to get ready for college and which college to go to."

Ruhama, age 12

The excitement and enthusiasm were palpable during the workshops as the girls used their imagination and creativity to choose colors and write text for their Web pages. The technology curriculum was geared towards personalizing the Web pages so that they were meaningful to the girls' lives. Girls searched the Web to find information for their Web pages entitled, "All About Me," "My Career," and "My Role Model."

SisterMentors technology workshops were conducted in response to a report by the American Association of University Women Educational Foundation released in 2000. The report cited alarming disparities in boys' and girls' enrollments in advanced computer classes, the small percentage of women earning computer/information science bachelor's degrees and the very small percentage of women with jobs in information technology.

Girls in middle and high schools in the Washington, D.C. area interviewed for the 2000 report identified a "computer person" as "male and antisocial" and when asked to describe a person who is "really good with computers," they described a man. One recommendation of the report was to start girls early in technology programs because many may have already formed limiting beliefs about their relationship with technology by the time they reach high school.

One of SisterMentors' goals for the workshops was to change the face of who was "really good with computers." SisterMentors hired Donya Douglas, an African American woman engineer at NASA and also a website specialist, to design the curriculum and teach the workshops. The goal was to empower the girls by presenting them with the image of a woman of color who was excellent with, and passionate about, computers.

Before designing the workshops, SisterMentors conducted a pretest to assess the girls' level of computer proficiency and their frequency of use. The pretest revealed that, although many of the girls had a computer at home or at school, they nevertheless had rudimentary computer skills. Despite having a sophisticated technology lab in their school, some girls possessed minimum typing skills and did not use computers regularly.

"Everything I learned today was new," said Kedest, age 13, after the last workshop. "I didn't know any of this stuff before." And that was the idea --- to introduce girls of color to new features of technology and to get them excited about learning more.

Making It Real

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The highlight of the day was the dialogue session between the women and girls. The girls paid close attention to what the women had to say and remained engaged throughout the session. The women discussed their transition from high school to college which one described as “a big transition” because college is a place where “you don’t return home to parents and siblings at the end of the day... and where professors may not even know your name.” Another said that it had been an emotional transition for her and her mother since she was the first in her family to go away to college. Her mother called her every day during her first year of college. The women encouraged the girls to maintain strong family bonds while in college.

Another aspect of transition the women discussed was their new-found independence and freedom when they first arrived at college. One of the women showed the girls a class syllabus and explained that professors would not ask them for homework or assignments, but that they were responsible for following the syllabus, including submitting work to the professor on time.

The women also informed the girls that no one would tell them that they should go to class because they are responsible for going to all their classes and getting there on time. One of the girls asked what happens when you miss classes. A woman responded that she would fall behind the class and her grades would suffer.

Life on Campus

The women then turned to their experiences on campus. They discussed being a minority on a predominantly white campus. One of the women talked about the isolation she faces as the only black woman in upper level science classes. She described herself in her male-dominated Engineering classes as “a minority of a minority.”

Another woman recounted some of the stereotypical views expressed by white students in her Government class during a recent debate on affirmative action. She cautioned the girls to be aware of stereotypes about them based on their race and ethnicity and added that not all white students shared the views of those expressed in her Government class. Another told the girls that they should open their minds to other races

and cultures and that they should not harbor stereotypes. The women encouraged the girls to learn about their own culture as well as other cultures around them.

Echoing advice given by the admissions officers, the women advised the girls to cultivate good study habits now so that they would be successful in college. One of the women said that she was amazed that our 7th grade girls were already thinking about college because she had not done so until junior year in high school. The women ended the session by advising the girls to prioritize their time in college and utilize their resources. They encouraged the girls to build self-esteem since they would have to know who they are to stay focused and motivated and succeed in college.



As they did last year, in their evaluation of the day, girls rated highest the dialogue session and their contact with the undergraduate women. The girls were so impressed with the visit that many of them said that they would like to attend the University of Maryland.

OUR VISIT TO GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY

The girls’ visit to the George Mason University, Fairfax campus the next day was another wonderful experience. Girls were hosted by the Office of Diversity Programs and Services. Since they had experienced an intense day at the University of Maryland and had learned a lot, the girls were well prepared to ask sophisticated questions at George Mason University.

Similar to the previous day at the University of Maryland, the girls heard presentations by admissions and financial aid officers. One of the girls asked the financial aid officer if scholarships are only for one year or for the entire four years. Another asked if freshmen are allowed to have cars. After the presentation, the girls were led on a tour of the campus by a woman of color undergraduate who is a pre-med student. She also showed them her dormitory.

The girls then dialogued with undergraduate students of color in a format where each girl had the opportunity to ask a question. They asked about transition from high school to college, diversity and courses offered.

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From a Member of EduSeed's Board

I am a member of EduSeed's Board of Directors and have served as Secretary for over three years.

I teach reading, writing, science, math and social studies to eight year olds in Chicago who face daunting odds. Poverty, discrimination, and poorly funded schools will all negatively impact their chances of attaining a basic high school diploma, not to mention the pipe dream of a college education. As a public school teacher in one of the toughest school systems in the country, I value the tremendous work of SisterMentors.

I know the difficulties my students will face without role models who can teach them firsthand about the opportunities afforded college graduates, as well as strategies to maneuver past obstacles they will most certainly face. I have seen my students get really excited about school and make terrific progress when they feel supported and know that others believe in them. High expectations also motivate students to achieve.

I love the SisterMentors program precisely because of the mentoring the girls receive and the peer support among the women. The belief that everyone should aim high is integral to the success of the program.

The commitment of both the organizers and participants in the program is amazing and brings about real results. I only wish that SisterMentors could be expanded throughout the country so that even more girls and women of color might benefit.

Michael Tajchman

Making It Real

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Girls also wanted to know what makes George Mason University unique, what is the value of a college degree and what career opportunities exist after college. The proximity of the university to other things in the area, including shopping malls and the quality of meals on campus were also important to the girls. Their questions were sharp and focused and it was evident that the girls had emerged very well informed from their visit to the University of Maryland.

Both campus visits made college real to the girls since the visits gave them a realistic picture of college life. One girl described the visits as "exciting but scary" and was reassured that as a 7th grader she has plenty of time to prepare. Feedback from parents showed great enthusiasm and appreciation for the visits, especially because the girls came away with concrete ideas about requirements for admission to college and about college life.

From One of Our Donors

"SisterMentors and EduSeed grew organically the way all long-term, successful projects should grow, from a simple observation — blind to others — women could flourish with doctorates given peer support, and well, why can't these extraordinary women radiate their accomplishments to girls, give them feasible dreams. I want to see these projects supported generously, expanded, rooted, multiplied, and broadly esteemed: our present society cries out for this well-run nonprofit organization, full of the right energy and goals."

Linda Orr
Professor of French and Francophone Studies
Duke University



Mentoring session with girls

SisterMentors on TV and Radio

MHz Networks will air a piece on SisterMentors Executive Director, Dr. Shireen Lewis, on her experience as an immigrant in the U.S. and her work with SisterMentors.

The show, "MHz Worldview Segments," is a collection of short stories about local peoples' personal journeys and how their culture has inspired and shaped who they are. It is due to air on television and on the Internet in the fall. Please tune in. We will update you on the exact date and time through our website.

MHz Networks reaches 4.7 million viewers throughout the Washington, D.C. area and also airs nationwide on Dish Network.

In July, SisterMentors was invited to the Metro Watch radio show on WPFW 89.3FM, Pacifica Radio. Metro Watch is hosted by veteran news director, Gloria Minott. Dr. Lewis spoke about SisterMentors' work and accomplishments.

SisterMentors' Recent Accomplishments

- Expanded program to include 8th grade girls of color at a public school designated as "failing."
- Independent evaluation of SisterMentors revealed "high satisfaction with program."
- 18 girls in middle and high school learned new computer skills and how to build a website in SisterMentors technology workshops.
- SisterMentors took 26 girls on two college visits where they learned about college life and how to prepare for college.
- Five more women of color received Ph.Ds, bringing total number to 19 women
SisterMentors has helped to receive doctorates since September 1997.

"When I joined SisterMentors in September 2002, it was in anticipation of the dreadful isolation of dissertation writing. I was looking for a supportive environment that would allow me to complete my dissertation in a reasonable timeframe. SisterMentors filled that need beyond my expectations. For me, the relevance of SisterMentors goes beyond the dissertation. Given that my research focuses on girls' and women's education, the most fulfilling part of belonging to SisterMentors is the opportunity to work with middle school girls of color from disadvantaged backgrounds."

*Codou Diaw
SisterMentors 2003 Graduate*

✂️ ===== PLEASE SUPPORT OUR WORK =====

Please support SisterMentors by sending a donation to help with our continued mentoring of women and girls of color. SisterMentors' goal is to raise \$20,000 by November 15, 2004.

- Yes, I would like to donate \$150 or more to SisterMentors. My check is enclosed.
- No, I cannot donate \$150 at this time but I am enclosing a check for:
- \$100 \$50
- \$75 \$Other
- Yes, my employer/company has a matching gift program and I have asked them to match my donation to SisterMentors.

For your convenience, you may use the enclosed addressed envelope. Please make your check payable to EduSeed/SisterMentors and mail to:

**EduSeed/SisterMentors
1666 K Street N.W., Suite 700
Washington, D.C. 20006**

Please remember your donation is tax deductible.



Who We Are

SisterMentors is a project of EduSeed, a nonprofit organization located in Washington, D.C. EduSeed's mission is to promote education among traditionally disadvantaged groups such as women and people of color. SisterMentors helps women of color to complete their dissertation and get the doctorate. The women in turn, while they are in our program, give back to their community by mentoring girls of color in middle and high schools. The women and girls are African American, Latina, Asian American and women and girls who are immigrants.

Our goal is to help stop the high drop-out rate among girls of color in middle and high school and also increase the number of women of color doctorates.

We believe that doctoral candidates and Ph.Ds of color are excellent role models — and a powerful yet untapped source of knowledge, motivation and inspiration — for children of color at risk of dropping out of school.

We exist because statistics show that more than 50 percent of doctoral candidates drop out of their programs. In 2002, out of 50.4 percent of women doctorates only 10.7 went to women of color (African American, Latina, Asian American, Native American combined). We also exist because girls of color are dropping out of school at an early age. Our message to girls is to stay in school, do well and go to college.

We have helped 19 women of color to complete their dissertations and get their doctorates since September 1997. We mentor two groups of girls in schools in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area.

EduSeed's Board of Directors

EduSeed's current board members are the following:

- € Timothy Boller
- € Claudia Cantarella
- € Montina M. Cole
- € Kangbai Konaté
- € Shireen K. Lewis
- € Douglas MacKinnon
- € Michael Tajchman
- € Diana Zentay

Thank You!!!

We would like to say a special thank you to our volunteer, Sarah Posner. Sarah has devoted many hours to our program by driving girls to our mentoring sessions on Saturdays, calling girls to remind them of our activities, attending mentoring sessions and even cooking for our girls. Thank you so much, Sarah!

Thanks to Cedric Briscoe of Treetop Publishing for donating his time and expertise to producing the wonderful color and sharp photo images on this newsletter. Thank you!

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