

# SISTERMENTORS

Promoting Education Among Women and Girls of Color

Summer/Fall 2002 Newsletter

A Newsletter for Donors and Friends of SisterMentors

## From the Executive Director

Dear Donors and Friends:

Welcome to our first newsletter. We want to update you on the wonderful and exciting things that you have helped us to achieve through your support of SisterMentors. As you may know, last year was our first year of fundraising and we were extremely encouraged by your strong support of our work. Many of you sent notes along with your checks praising our program. Your donation helped us to build our website, [sistermentors.org](http://sistermentors.org), which we launched late last year. It has also helped us to create a new group of women of color doctoral candidates and to mentor a new group of girls of color.

Our programs continue to help many women and girls of color to beat the odds. Our newest Ph.D., Kangbai Konaté, joins 13 other women of color that SisterMentors has helped to complete the dissertation and get the doctorate. Kangbai recently received her doctorate with highest honors in Sociology from Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales in Paris, France. She lives in

*continued on page 2*



## Mentoring Girls of Color

This May, SisterMentors expanded its mentoring to include a new group of girls of color from two public middle schools in Alexandria, Virginia.

SisterMentors' women are excellent role models for girls of color who look up to entertainers and athletes almost exclusively. The girls we mentor see women of color who look like them and who have persevered and achieved academic success despite the odds.

Our mentoring in Alexandria was in collaboration with "Project Step Out," which consists of African American, Latina, and Afghan girls. Our session was attended by 14 girls ages 12 to 13 in sixth and seventh grades. Our discussion with the girls was lively, engaging, educational, and a lot of fun. SisterMentors' women introduced themselves as doctoral candidates and explained the purpose of a doctorate.

We had an "Oprah-like" session with a panel of "experts" --- two girls and two SisterMentors women --- and an "audience" of the remaining participants. We engaged in a spirited discussion about whether school

*continued on page 2*

## Celebrating Our Newest Ph.D.

On May 17, 2002, Kangbai Konaté became SisterMentors' fourteenth Ph.D. Kangbai received her doctorate with highest honors in Sociology from Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, one of the most prestigious universities in France. Her dissertation committee was made up of distinguished scholars such as Michel Wieviorka, Elikia M'Bokolo, Denis Lacorne, and John Atherton. After about three hours of tough grilling by her committee about her dissertation, Kangbai was awarded her doctorate. Family and friends present at her defense applauded her great accomplishment.

Like many SisterMentors women, Kangbai is the first generation in her family to get a doctorate. With her father from Guinea and her mother from Mali, Kangbai was born and grew up in France and has been living in the U.S. for the past five years. She plans to continue doing international work on women and girls' education, particularly in Francophone Africa. We are pleased that Kangbai has recently become a member of EduSeed's Board of Directors. At least two more SisterMentors women are scheduled to receive their doctorates in 2002.

### IN THIS ISSUE

|                                                                                                   |   |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|
| From the Executive Director. . . . .                                                              | 1 |
| Mentoring Girls of Color . . . . .                                                                | 1 |
| Celebrating Our Newest Ph.D. . . . .                                                              | 1 |
| SisterMentors Receives Grant from the AAUW Educational Foundation . . . . .                       | 2 |
| Who We Are and Why People Support Our Work . . . . .                                              | 3 |
| EduSeed's Board of Directors Grows . .                                                            | 4 |
| SisterMentors Launches <a href="http://www.sistermentors.org">www.sistermentors.org</a> . . . . . | 4 |

## From the Executive Director

Continued from page 1

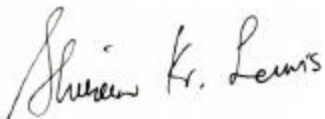
Washington, D.C., but was born and raised in France by parents who are immigrants from Francophone Africa.

Our mentoring of girls of color continues to grow. We are now mentoring a new group of public middle school girls of color in the Washington Metropolitan area in Alexandria, Virginia. These girls are being mentored by our new group of women doctoral candidates. We believe that doctoral candidates and Ph.D.s of color are a powerful yet largely untapped source of knowledge, motivation, and inspiration for children of color at risk of dropping out of school. Their stories and examples of perseverance and sacrifice to attain the university's highest degree positively impacts children of color.

SisterMentors will celebrate its fifth anniversary this September. We have made considerable strides since our inception in 1997, not the least of which is our status as a nonprofit program under the umbrella of EduSeed, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

I invite you to contact us at any time if you need further information about our work and encourage you to visit our website at [sistermentors.org](http://sistermentors.org) and subscribe to our monthly e-newsletter. We'd love to hear from you. You can reach me either by email at [director@sistermentors.org](mailto:director@sistermentors.org), or at the SisterMentors' office at (202) 775-6846.

Thanks again for your support of SisterMentors!



Shireen K. Lewis, Ph.D.

## Mentoring Girls of Color

Continued from page 1

has any meaning in their lives and if school is relevant to their future. One of the girls said that she has to stay in school because it is only then that she will be able to tell her kids that they should not be school dropouts. A SisterMentors woman explained that she used to work in a factory, and that education has helped her to get a better job.

The first question to the panel was, "at what age did you begin school and how long have you been in school?" The two middle school girls replied that they started school in kindergarten at the age of five and have been in school for seven years. Some of the girls in the audience gasped when SisterMentors women explained that they have been in school for about twenty years. One of the girls promptly asked in a very serious tone, "don't you guys ever get tired of homework?" From the girls' reactions, this was most likely their first dialogue with anyone who had been in school for such a long time.

When discussing the issue of school dropout, about half of the girls said they knew someone who had dropped out of middle or high school. The reasons ranged from poverty to pregnancy and drug abuse.

Led by a SisterMentors woman who is getting her doctorate in Drama and Directing, we finished our session with the girls performing short skits on the themes we had discussed. The girls were very excited about our time together and asked us to do it again the following weekend. We promised to return for more dialogue and communion in the new school year.

---

## SisterMentors Receives Grant from the AAUW Educational Foundation



SisterMentors helps women of color complete their dissertations and get their doctorates.

SisterMentors received a grant from the American Association of University Women ("AAUW") Educational Foundation for 2001-2002. The AAUW advocates for education and equity for women and girls and is the world's largest source of funding for graduate women. The AAUW grant helped us build our website, start a new group for women of color doctoral candidates, and mentor a new group of girls of color. The AAUW issued a press release announcing the grant. Jacqueline E. Woods, AAUW's Executive Director, praised SisterMentors as "*the kind of innovative program that is at the heart of our mission ... [t]he group is doubly effective because it helps graduate women and young girls to advance and succeed.*"

# Who We Are and Why People Support Our Work

SisterMentors, a project of the nonprofit organization, EduSeed, helps women of color complete their dissertations and get their doctorates. The women in turn give back to their community by mentoring girls of color in middle and high schools in the Washington, D.C. area. The women and girls are African American, Latina, Asian American, and women and girls who are immigrants. In 2002, SisterMentors will help 23 women of color and 25 girls of color.

People support our work because of the high quality of our program and our track record for success. In the almost five years of our existence, SisterMentors has helped 14 women of color to get their Ph.D. and mentors two groups of girls in middle and high school. At least two more

SisterMentors' women will get their doctorates in 2002 and many more are moving toward the finish line.

Statistics show that 50 percent of all people who begin a doctorate drop out of their program, particularly at the dissertation writing stage. Evidence suggests that the numbers are higher for women of color. Of all the doctoral degrees awarded in 2000, only 9.9 percent went to women of color (Latina, African American, Asian



American, and Native American). We help SisterMentors' women to beat these odds by bringing them together for peer-mentoring, including reading each other's work and providing constructive feedback, getting together in small groups to write, sharing resources, and giving each other advice about how to deal with the politics of the dissertation process. Our peer-mentoring model is reinforced by group mentoring and individual coaching by SisterMentors' Founder and Executive Director, Shireen Lewis.

Studies show that girls of color are dropping out of school at an early age. A recent study shows a 30 percent dropout rate among Latinas in middle and high school. The scarcity of women of color role models in college and doctoral programs is cited as one of the reasons

for the high dropout rate among girls of color. At SisterMentors we believe that doctoral candidates and Ph.D.s of color are a powerful yet largely untapped source of knowledge, motivation, and inspiration for children of color at risk of dropping out of school. Their stories of perseverance, hard work, and sacrifice to obtain the university's highest degree have a great impact on youth of color. Our message to girls of color is to stay in school, do well, and go on to college.

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

Please support SisterMentors by sending a donation to help our continued mentoring of women and girls of color. SisterMentors' goal is to raise \$20,000 by September 15, 2002.

- Yes, I would like to donate \$100 or more to SisterMentors. My check is enclosed.
- No, I cannot donate \$100 at this time but I am enclosing a check for:
  - \$75                       \$25
  - \$50                          \$Other \_\_\_\_\_

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.*



## EduSeed's Board of Directors Grows

SisterMentors is a project of the nonprofit organization, EduSeed. EduSeed's mission is to promote education among historically disadvantaged and underserved communities such as women and people of color. EduSeed's current board members are the following:

- Timothy Boller
- Claudia Cantarella
- Montina Cole
- Kangbai Konaté
- Shireen Lewis
- Michael Tajchman
- Diana Zentay

We would like to welcome our new board members, Timothy Boller, Claudia Cantarella, Kangbai Konaté, and Diana Zentay! Please visit [www.eduseed.org](http://www.eduseed.org) for a profile on each board member. We would also like to thank past board member, Selena Mendy Singleton, for her service to the organization.

## SisterMentors Launches [www.sistermentors.org](http://www.sistermentors.org)



Thanks to generous support from our donors and a grant from the AAUW Educational Foundation, SisterMentors launched its website in late 2001.

Our blue "splash" page is an exciting introduction to our website, which is a combination of visual beauty and good information about our program. Under our "Doctoral Candidates" link, check out short bios on SisterMentors' women of color doctoral candidates and descriptions of their dissertations. We also have links to pages describing our vision for mentoring girls of color. Don't miss our "What's New" link, which has media articles on SisterMentors including an article in Ms. magazine. The "What's New" link also archives our monthly e-newsletters from the Executive Director. Sign up for the monthly e-newsletter and return to the site each month for something new! These are just some of the highlights of our website. Check it out for much, much more! Our website and newsletter were designed by Donya Douglas of BBC Technologies. Visit their website at <http://www.bbctechbiz.com>.

### EDUSEED/SISTERMENTORS

1666 K Street N.W., Suite 700  
Washington, D.C. 20006  
Promoting Education Among Women and Girls of Color  
*Summer/Fall 2002 Newsletter*