

SISTERMENTORS

Promoting Education Among Women and Girls of Color

Fall/Winter 2003 Newsletter

A Newsletter for Donors and Friends of SisterMentors

From the Executive Director

Dear Donors and Friends:

Welcome to our second newsletter and to the start of our fundraising efforts this year. This is indeed an exciting time for SisterMentors because we are enjoying great success.

In addition to receiving high praise from the girls we mentor and their mothers, we have helped three more women of color to complete their dissertations and get their doctorates. Danielle White, Monica Marshall and Genevieve Yirenkyi all received their doctorates between the end of April and early June. This brings the total number of women SisterMentors has helped to 17 since our inception in September 1997. Like many SisterMentors women, some of our graduates are the first generation in their family to get an advanced degree.

Some of the girls we mentor and their mothers attended our recent celebration of Danielle White's doctorate. We invite our girls to these celebrations because we want them to join in celebrating academic success and for them to understand that excelling in school — through hard work and perseverance — is a positive thing.

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Our Girls Go to College!!

On April 16, SisterMentors collaborated with the Alexandria Office on Women to take seventh and eighth grade girls of color for

a visit and workshops at the University of Maryland, College Park.

The girls were twelve and thirteen years old from middle schools in Alexandria, Virginia and Prince George's County, Maryland. Twelve girls came on the trip.

The campus visit was organized primarily for girls transitioning from middle to high school so that they would know how to best position themselves in high school for admission to college and for them to get an inside view of college life.

With breakfast donated by Whole Foods Market, the girls ate on the bus on our way to the university. We fully realized the importance of offering breakfast when one of the girls said that she was hungry as we were about to board the bus for the trip.

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Celebrating Three New Ph.Ds

We are very pleased to announce our newest Ph.Ds:

- Danielle White received her doctorate in Political Science from American University on April 28. Her dissertation is on African American representatives in Congress. Danielle was born in Florida and grew up in Western Massachusetts. Her career plans include public policy research and advocacy.
- Monica Marshall received her doctorate in Social Psychology from American University on June 10. Her dissertation is on the impact of family structure on psychological well-being by race, class, and gender.
- Genevieve Yirenkyi* received her doctorate in Clinical Psychology from Pacifica Graduate School of Psychology in California on June 12. Her dissertation is on racial socialization and academic success among at-risk minority high school students. Born in Ghana, West Africa, Genevieve migrated to the U.S. at the age of five. Genevieve's career plans include providing therapeutic and diagnostic services to minority children in a community health setting.

**Genevieve will officially receive her doctorate after she completes her hospital internship next year.*

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From the Executive Director

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The celebration was a joyous occasion. As we were winding down our program a mother stood up and asked if she could speak. She then praised SisterMentors for the work we are doing with her daughter and with the other girls in the program. "I wish I had someone to inspire me when I was growing up," she added, "so that I could have lived up to my full potential." Another mother also thanked SisterMentors for the work we are doing.

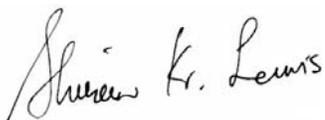
We were thrilled by these spontaneous words of praise from these powerful women — mothers of the girls we mentor. We are indeed full of hope and optimism about the future.

Please join me in celebrating our wonderful success this year. I am just as passionate today about the work we are doing as I was when I founded SisterMentors almost six years ago.

As always, I would like to thank you — our donors and friends — for your wonderful support. We simply cannot do this work without you. It is your support that enabled us to expand our program and take our girls to visit the University of Maryland so that they can begin to see college as a real place where they can go and succeed. Please continue to support us.

Please do not hesitate to contact me with questions or comments. I would be happy to speak with you at any time. You can reach me either by email at director@sistermentors.org, or at the SisterMentors office at 202-775-6846.

Thanks again for your support of SisterMentors!



Shireen K. Lewis, Ph.D.



SisterMentors women at our fifth anniversary celebration

Our Girls Go to College

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Dr. Chontrese Doswell, of the University of Maryland, organized the program for the day and undergraduate women of color, who are the first in their family to attend college, made up the host committee.

The girls' morning session included workshops by admissions and financial aid officers. The admissions officer informed the girls of what they should start doing right now to get into college. The financial aid officers spoke to the girls about the overall cost of college and where to research scholarships and other monies.

Women of color undergraduates took the girls to class with them. Some girls went to a small seminar business class while others went to a large sociology class held in a lecture hall. The girls also visited dormitories and apartments on campus to see how students live.

After lunch, the girls were treated to an afternoon dialogue session with women of color who are in their sophomore and senior years. The women described their transition from high school to college. One of the women shared that she had a very difficult time adjusting to the lack of structure and failed many of her classes her first semester. She then talked about how she bounced back by learning how to better manage her time.

The women also shared their experiences as women of color on a predominantly white campus. They talked about having to explain their race or ethnicity to fellow students, some of whom had stereotypical views of people of color based on rap music and television. The girls listened in rapt attention to the women and hands shot up constantly to ask questions and make comments. In their evaluation of the day, the girls rated highest the dialogue session with the women of color undergraduates.

In our follow-up session soon after the visit, some of the girls said that they had not thought of going to college, nor had anyone talked to them about college. However, their experience on campus now made them want to go. After the visit, one girl had even looked up several colleges on the internet, as the admissions officer had advised them to do.

The girls suggested that we visit another college campus since they had learned so much and had such a good time during the visit.

"SisterMentors is about women helping young girls with the path to education. It's a positive group. We talk not only about school but also about the school environment. SisterMentors [women] take time to listen and give advice."

Rachel, age 13

SisterMentors Recognized by Women's Foundation



Mentoring session with girls

SisterMentors was recently recognized by the Washington Area Women's Foundation ("Women's Foundation") as a "community innovation."

In the first comprehensive study of women and girls in the Washington metropolitan area, the Women's Foundation listed SisterMentors as one of five regional programs that promote education among girls.

The study is a collaboration of more than 20 leading organizations and examines the lives of the region's 1.8 million women and girls over an 18 month period.

The study identifies Latina and African American girls, in the Washington, D.C. area, as most at risk for not earning a high school degree. *Fifty percent of Latina women and one-third of African American women in Washington, D.C. do not have high school diplomas.* Girls in Alexandria, Virginia are experiencing high poverty and high teenage pregnancy.

The Women's Foundation recommends making mentoring available to girls — as a strategy to strengthen communities in the region — because girls need role models and supporters to encourage them to continue their education.

"Hi Dr. Lewis,

I am still filled with so much excitement after meeting your sisters. You are just what my heart has been praying for. I believe that all children need to be inspired and inspiration comes in many forms. Leading by example truly is the most measurable. Thank you and SisterMentors for being such great examples of what commitment, teamwork, leadership and hard work can lead to in terms of achievement."

Bunny Honduras, Aunt of a SisterMentors Girl

===== 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 October 15, 2003.

- 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 _____

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



Thank you for your support!

Please remember your donation is tax deductible.

Who We Are

SisterMentors is a project of EduSeed, a nonprofit organization. EduSeed's mission is to promote education particularly among traditionally disadvantaged and underserved communities such as women and people of color. SisterMentors helps women of color to complete their dissertations and get the doctorate. The women in turn give back to their community by mentoring and supporting 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 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 of color drop out of their program and studies show 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 17 women of color to complete their dissertations and get their doctorates since September 1997. We mentor two groups of girls of color in schools in the Washington, D.C. area.

EduSeed's Board of Directors

EduSeed's current board members are the following:

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

"I completed and defended my dissertation less than a year after joining SisterMentors. I credit a lot of that success to SisterMentors. The program provided a structured environment that helped me manage my time and workload. SisterMentors women offered advice, suggestions and sympathetic ears. There were several occasions when I believed I might have given up if I did not have the support of these women."

Danielle White, SisterMentors Graduate, 2003

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