

# SISTERMENTORS

Promoting Education Among Women and Girls of Color  
A Project of EduSeed

Fall/Winter 2013 Newsletter

A Newsletter for Donors and Friends of SisterMentors

## Our College Graduates

This May, four of the young women SisterMentors helped send to college graduated after completing four years of undergraduate studies. Rediet Abate graduated from the University of Mary Washington in Fredericksburg, Virginia with a major in Psychology and a minor in Biology. Kedest Firdaweke graduated from Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, Virginia with a major in Mass Communications. Nathalie Navarette graduated from Bates College in Lewiston, Maine with a double major in Politics with a concentration in Political Economy, and French and Francophone Studies. Ruhama Yared



Ruhama Yared, Goucher College, Class of 2013

graduated from Goucher College in Baltimore, Maryland with a major in Education and a minor in Mathematics.

All of these young women value their college education and believe that their experiences in college have helped to make them smarter and stronger.

We are humbled by these young women’s energy, drive and determination to succeed in school and in life. We are thrilled that all of them plan to further their education by going to graduate school and some are considering earning a doctorate. As these young women contemplate their next steps, we look forward to continuing to support them.

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## 44 Women of Color Doctorates

SisterMentors has helped two more women to earn doctorates this year bringing to 44 the number of women we have helped to earn doctorates in the past sixteen years.

Shanna L. Smith earned a Ph.D. in American Studies from the University of Maryland College Park in July. Shanna’s dissertation is titled, “Tell Me Your Diamonds: Story Bearing in African American Women’s Life History Narratives.”

Toya Jones Frank earned a Ph.D. in Mathematics Education from the University of Maryland College Park in July. Toya’s dissertation is titled, “Widgets and Digits: A Study of Novice Middle School Teachers Attending to Mathematics Identity in Practice.”

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## From the Executive Director

Dear Donors and Friends:

Something good happens at SisterMentors every day and I am always excited to share the good news with you.

As always, I am grateful to all of you for helping us do this work through both donations and in-kind support. Many of you not only send us a check every year but you also include a note congratulating us on our work. I thank you so much for your generosity and for your continued support.

This has been an exciting year of celebrating SisterMentors' 15th Anniversary and we have celebrated all year long, from our fifteenth anniversary in fall 2012 to our sixteenth anniversary in fall 2013.

We are very happy about our four young women, Rediet, Kedest, Nathalie and Ruhama, who graduated from college this May after four years of undergraduate studies. Since all but one has been in SisterMentors since middle school, we have watched them grow from young girls to accomplished young women and we are so proud of them.

They are all now considering continuing their education by going to graduate school --- just like their mentors! We are thrilled! All of them are part of the first generation in their families to graduate from college. We know that they will all go far and will also reach back to help others. Ruhama is already doing so by volunteering to tutor one of our sixth graders in Mathematics.

We are also very happy for Shanna and Toya, the two women we helped earn their doctorates this year. Shanna earned her doctorate in American Studies and Toya in Mathematics Education. Earning a doctorate requires grit --- hard work, focus and perseverance --- so we salute these women on this major achievement. They are great role models for the girls and young women in our program as examples of single-mindedness about goals and persistence in the face of struggle and failure. Shanna and Toya each spent approximately three years in our program and had a substantial impact on our young girls and on our organization. We thank them for their contributions.

Our young girls are working hard in school because their mentors tell them that completing their homework and projects and turning them in on time play a major role in their success in school. We recently added fifth graders



Our Girls in High School

who mentors tutor in reading, writing and math. Many of our girls who started with us in elementary and middle school are now in high school and focused on taking rigorous classes in preparation for applying to college. Since they have been in SisterMentors for quite a few years and have visited many universities, they know what it takes to get admitted to college.

This year, we continued to engage parents, including holding meetings to discuss how parents can help their daughters succeed in school and on preparing for college, with Dean Valerie Gregory, Associate Dean of Admissions and Director of the Outreach Office at the University of Virginia. Dean Gregory talked with girls and parents about what it takes to be competitive for more selective universities, answered questions, and met with girls and parents one-on-one to advise on their individual needs. Parents expressed much gratitude for this highly informative meeting.

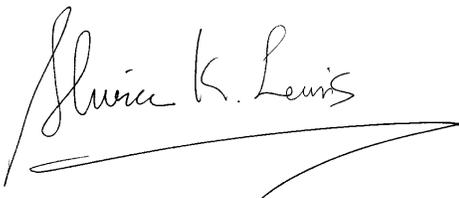
We have been working hard the past few years to bring the SisterMentors message to more people as we continue to build a community around our work. Over 300 people, most of whom were hearing about SisterMentors for the first time, attended our one-hour information sessions titled, *Discover SisterMentors*. In their feedback, guests raved about the testimonies --- from the girls and women that we serve, and about the impact of our work on their lives and on the lives of their families. If you have not yet attended one of these sessions and would like to come, please let me know as we are scheduling sessions for 2014. I promise that you will learn a lot more about SisterMentors and will leave inspired and uplifted --- all in just one hour!

I am humbled by your generosity and grateful for your support these past years. We know that times are tough for many due to the economy, but I kindly request that, as the year draws to a close, you put SisterMentors on your list of priorities for giving. We thank you for the huge role you play, through your donations, in helping the women and girls in SisterMentors pursue their dreams of higher education. We simply cannot do this work without your support.

Please continue to support us. You can send a check in the mail, make a donation online at [sistermentors.org](http://sistermentors.org) by clicking on the **DONATE NOW** link, or donate to us through the Combined Federal Campaign (CFC). Our CFC number is 90398 and we are listed under our umbrella nonprofit organization, EduSeed.

As always, I encourage you to contact me for any reason. I am always delighted to hear from you. I can be reached at [director@sistermentors.org](mailto:director@sistermentors.org) or 202-778-6424. I look forward to talking with you.

Sincerely,



Shireen K. Lewis, Ph.D.



Our Visit to Yogaville

## 44 Women of Color Doctorates

*continued from page 1*



Toya Jones Frank and Shanna L. Smith

### Toya Jones Frank

After earning my doctorate, I became a tenure-track assistant professor in Secondary Mathematics Education at George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia.

I was the first person in my family to finish college. I have built a career in mathematics education for the last 15 years. My research interests include issues of equity and access in secondary mathematics and mathematics teacher knowledge and lived experiences. As a professor of mathematics education, I am preparing our next generation of middle and high school mathematics teachers to teach sound mathematics content, but to do so in a way that honors diversity and equity. I hope that this philosophy will help spark the interest of students who traditionally have not been interested in mathematics.

### Shanna L. Smith

My dissertation is an autoethnographic project specifically examining life histories --- biography, historical fiction and memoir --- that recover family history, reassert a counter narrative to known events, and lend themselves to social action. The women writers I feature discovered female ancestors who built business empires, became philanthropists, dealt with familial loss as the result of racial passing, authored biographies of abolitionists under male pseudonyms, and implemented early black women's clubs for racial uplift.

My experiences growing up in Kentucky and listening to stories told by elder relatives instilled the passion I have for family history and narrative recovery.

I currently work at the National Archives and Records Administration. I am pursuing career opportunities in academia and public history institutions that are centered on African American culture and oral history.

# Our College Graduates

*continued from page 1*

## **Rediet Abate, University of Mary Washington**

I graduated from the University of Mary Washington in Fredericksburg, Virginia with a major in Psychology and a minor in Biology. I am part of the first generation in my family to go to college. My older sister started before me but because of SisterMentors, I had an easier college experience because I was exposed to different colleges at an early age and I knew where I wanted to go and where I didn't.

I started SisterMentors in eighth grade because all of my friends were a part of it. Turned out that it was the best decision I've made when it came to following the crowd. I chose the University of Mary Washington because it was everything I was looking for in a college. It had a beautiful campus and it was a small school so I knew I would have a closer relationship with my teachers as compared to a bigger university. Also, it was the right distance away from home so I wasn't homesick.

The most significant thing I did in college was working as a student athletic trainer for varsity sports. It not only put me on the right track for my future but also made college a better experience as a whole. A class that changed my life was Biopsychology, taught by an awesome professor who not only made me love the field of Psychology but also made me realize that there were other things out in the world besides Biology that I could potentially study.

College taught me that time is a very precious thing and if you don't know how to prioritize things and manage them, it can destroy you. I've also learned that education doesn't necessarily have to be gained only in the classroom.

I want to earn a doctorate in Physical Therapy (DPT) so I plan to take the prerequisite classes that I would need for admission into a doctoral program. Also, I am currently taking classes to get licensed for massage therapy by the end of this year. I plan to work as a massage therapist while attending graduate school and as soon as I get my DPT, I plan to put both skills together --- massage therapy and physical therapy --- so I can open my own practice.

## **Kedest Firdaweke, Virginia Commonwealth University**

I graduated this past May from Virginia Commonwealth



**Rediet Abate**

University (VCU) with a major in Mass Communications. I started SisterMentors when I was in seventh grade so that makes about ten years that I have been in the program. The college visits with SisterMentors were really important to me since my mother is a working single mother and could not afford the time or money to take me to visit colleges. The SAT prep classes were also very important since they prepared me well for the SAT Test and helped make me competitive for college admission.

My most significant college experience was as a Resident Assistant (RA). As a RA, I received training to supervise students living in my dormitory hall. My responsibilities included helping students to transition smoothly into campus life, creating programs to help build community, promoting diversity and being a mediator when necessary. I learned a lot about myself and about teamwork.

My Women's Studies class was the most life-changing experience. Before taking that class, I was ignorant about feminism but after learning about issues that affect women, I became a feminist.

I am part of the first generation in my family to go to college so this is all fairly new to us. My mother has four daughters and I am the third to earn a college degree. I brought my little sister, Frahiwot, into SisterMentors when she was in fourth grade. I wanted her to get guidance so she would stay focused on her studies and build her self-confidence since she was very shy. Today, she is sixteen years old, in the tenth grade, no longer shy, and continues to love SisterMentors. One of the moments in SisterMentors I cherish the most was when Frahiwot went with me on a college visit. She loved every moment and I was so happy. After Frahiwot goes to college, my mother wants to go back to school and earn a college degree. After learning about Ph.Ds from SisterMentors,



**Kedest Firdaweke**

my mother now wants all of her daughters to earn doctorates.

I am currently working as a project manager with a nonprofit organization called Diversity Theatre. I am also a substitute teacher. My future plans include going to graduate school for a Master's or Ph.D. in Psychology.

#### **Nathalie Navarette, Bates College**

I graduated from Bates College in Maine this past May with a double major in Politics with a concentration in Political Economy, and French and Francophone Studies. I was introduced to SisterMentors by my best friend Rediet Abate who had been part of the program since middle school. SisterMentors helped prepare me for college by paying for SAT prep courses and taking me on college visits.

I decided to attend Bates because of the close knit community fostered by small class sizes, the opportunities to volunteer off campus and the focus on studying abroad. Although the idea of attending college so far away seemed intimidating at first, I knew that this would be a great opportunity for me.

Not only did Bates provide a supportive learning environment but I was also encouraged to do independent research. I wrote two theses during my senior year, one for Politics and the other for French. My Politics thesis argued that Dominican-Haitian citizenship revocation was a result of segmented labor market theory. My French thesis analyzed the cultural linguistic aspect of identity as presented in the work of Haitian writer, Dany Laferrière. I also had the opportunity to study abroad twice in France.

I also worked with grassroots organizations to educate and mobilize voters in New England and volunteered as



**Nathalie Navarette**

an after-school tutor and a classroom assistant in public schools. I was accepted to the Sorensen Institute College Leaders Program at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville and I am a graduate of the Class of 2012.

These experiences encouraged me to pursue a year of national service with AmeriCorps after graduation. Currently, I serve as a City Year Corps Member in the District of Columbia Public School system. City Year focuses on keeping students on track to graduate from high school.

After my year of service with City Year, I plan to pursue a Masters' degree in Public Policy.

#### **Ruhama Yared, Goucher College**

I graduated from Goucher College in Baltimore, Maryland this past May with a Bachelor of Arts in Education and a minor in Mathematics. I am the first in my family to go to college. I enjoyed being at a small liberal arts school as I had the chance to build lasting relationships with professors, staff, and classmates.

I began SisterMentors when I was twelve years old and in the 7th grade. I was brought into the program because I was in an after-school program called Project Stepout run by Ms. Myra Stafford. I'm very glad I made the decision to join SisterMentors because Dr. Lewis and the mentors have helped me get to where I am today — a college graduate. They took me on college trips, showed me what to do to get into a good college, and they were there for me throughout my college years, whenever I needed them.

One of the most significant things I did during my college years was to study abroad at the University of the West Indies at the Cave Hill campus in Bridgetown, Barbados.

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## Social Skills and Leadership Workshop



“Make eye contact, stand straight, speak louder.” These are some of the new lessons the girls said they learned during our annual Social Skills and Leadership Workshop in May. Held in partnership with the Jefferson Hotel, located a few blocks away from the White House, the workshop was taught by Ms. Fannie Allen of the prestigious Allen Etiquette Institute.

This year’s focus was on training girls to speak in front of a live audience and an interactive discussion about emotional maturity. The girls had been asked to prepare beforehand a “Me Commercial,” a short powerful introduction of themselves. One of the older girls who is well trained in public speaking was asked to demonstrate her presentation to the younger girls. Individual girls then went to a podium to deliver their “Me Commercial” while the others were asked to watch and listen closely so that they could give constructive feedback. Having never spoken in front of an audience, the younger girls were very nervous and needed the most encouragement. Some of the girls were asked to try again incorporating feedback from the audience. Many of them felt renewed self-confidence since they were applauded by the other girls and complimented by the instructor on the improvements they had made.

“Amazing, incredible,” said one of the girls in describing the entire workshop. The interactive discussion on emotional maturity was designed to help with girls’ personal development --- for them to continue to do inner work on self-awareness and self-esteem. The discussion started with a definition of emotions and the positive and negative ways one can react when certain feelings arise

in certain situations. Girls discussed that, despite their emotions, they can choose the way they react, that they can have self-restraint and can set boundaries with others. The girls were encouraged to be honest with themselves, to learn to relate well with others, to not easily get offended, and to take responsibility for their words and actions.

“I learned how to position the fork and knife after eating,” said one of the girls. The last part of the workshop was a four course meal served by staff at the Jefferson Hotel. Girls who have been taking this workshop for the past few years were asked to serve in advisory roles, that is, to provide tips and suggestions at different points in the workshop. “Wonderful, big, beautiful,” are the words one of the girls used to describe the workshop.

This year, we continued to work on girls’ personal development by taking what they learned in their “Me Commercial,” and building on it in our mentoring sessions. We asked girls to interview their parents and to gather information about a number of things, including their parents’ childhoods, sacrifices parents have made for their families, and their hopes and dreams for themselves and their children. The girls then presented their findings to us at our mentoring sessions. They were very excited about interviewing their parents and many of them told us that they learned many new things ranging from their parents’ favorite color to the most challenging moments in their parents’ lives.

One of the outcomes we hope for with this project is that the stories parents tell about their lives, including their challenges and sacrifices, will help girls to have a better understanding of who they are in the context of their families and will inspire and motivate them to work harder in school.

It really takes a village and I am so thankful to you, Abigail and all the women of SisterMentors. THANK YOU for the session on Saturday. And that kiss on the cheek you gave to Jess touched her so. She came home feeling very positive after her time with Abigail.

Nancy Jairrels  
Mother of 12th grader who has been in  
SisterMentors since the 4th grade

# Our Visit to Howard University, University of Maryland College Park and George Mason University



This year, we stayed close to home for our college visits as we wanted the girls in our program to see options that are close to their families and neighborhoods. Twenty girls in SisterMentors visited Howard University in Washington, D.C., the University of Maryland in College Park and George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia. Girls met with leaders at the universities including two presidents, attended classes, met with women of color undergraduates, toured a dormitory, visited a center on African American visual arts and culture, and ate in the dining halls.

## Our Visit to Howard University

Our first visit was to Howard University. Founded in 1867, after the end of the Civil War, Howard was first conceptualized as a theological seminary for African American clergymen. Shortly after, the idea to create a university was born and the new institution was named after General Oliver O. Howard, a Civil War hero who was both founder of the university and commissioner of the Freedman's Bureau. Howard is a Historically Black College or University (HBCU) which was created to educate black students who were denied admission to institutions of higher education because of their race.

Today, Howard is a private historically black research university comprised of 10,000 students, 13 schools and colleges and more than 120 areas of study leading to undergraduate, graduate and professional degrees.

The girls' visit was graciously hosted by Dr. Valarie Turner, Special Assistant to President Sidney A. Ribeau,

the sixteenth president of the university. The girls learned from the staff in the Office of Admissions that Howard is an extremely diverse school with students from all over the United States and all over the world. It is therefore not unusual for new students to experience culture shock since their roommate from Brooklyn may say "it's mad brick outside," meaning that it is freezing cold, leaving roommates from other parts of the country puzzled and at a loss for understanding what was said.

Three highlights of our visit to Howard were a symposium on black women in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math), our meeting with outgoing President Sidney A. Ribeau, and our conversation with women students from the Freshman Leadership Academy.

After the symposium on black women in STEM, one of the girls said: "I learned a lot about science ... [and that] a lot of women should go into STEM so that they can be successful." Since SisterMentors has begun focusing more on STEM, it was very important for girls to attend this symposium at Howard. The girls listened to presentations by several women faculty, including the first and only woman in the mechanical engineering department.

"He is kind, smart, brave and strong!," said one of the girls after meeting President Ribeau. The president walked into the room and immediately engaged the girls in conversation. He asked them to introduce themselves and to talk about their time on campus so far. He also gave a brief history of the university, including that Howard was founded as "a university of opportunity." He then asked girls to explain the role of the president and a fifth grader responded that the president is there to "make sure the school is good." The president then explained that he is indeed responsible for the quality of the faculty, the facilities and the environment in which the students learn and grow.

President Ribeau said that Howard students are very supportive of each other and have a strong sense of responsibility toward each other. They are also taught to respect others and to make sure that they give back, "especially to those who are left out of the system." Howard students plan an alternative spring break where they travel to eight cities in the United States and Haiti.

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“I would describe it as a very good and serious discussion about Howard,” said one of our girls in describing our meeting with the president.

Toward the end of their day, the girls met with women students from the Freshman Leadership Academy and those students were exceptional. They each had compelling stories about their journeys to Howard and their experiences at the University. One of the students revealed that she did not initially want to go to Howard because she had experienced many black people in high school who performed at a mediocre level and believed that she would find the same at Howard. However, she admitted that she was wrong since she has met so many truly amazing black people at Howard from all over the United States and the world.

All of the students talked about gaining a better sense of who they are and learning to be more self-confident at Howard. One of the students told the girls “it is not about where you’re from but where you want to be.” Since another student had mentioned that she directed a gospel choir in high school, one of the girls asked her to sing a song. The student sang “His Eyes are on the Sparrow” and the whole room erupted in applause.

### **Our Visit to the University of Maryland College Park**

Our visit to the University of Maryland (UMD) was graciously hosted by Dean Bonnie Thornton Dill, the first African American woman dean of one of the university’s largest colleges, the Department of Arts and Sciences. Prior to becoming dean, Dean Dill was a professor in the Women’s Studies Department for more than two decades and is responsible for that department’s national prominence, including as one of the few departments that offer a doctorate in Women’s Studies.

Some of the girls reconnected with Dean Dill since they had attended one of her classes at Princeton University when she was a Visiting Professor there during our visit in 2010. Dean Dill welcomed the girls to UMD and encouraged them to remember to do their homework before watching television or playing video games. J. Darius Greene, the Associate Director of Student Affairs, spent the entire day with the girls, graciously escorting them to each place on their itinerary.

### Admissions at UMD

“It’s not how you start, it’s how you finish. Don’t get “Cs,” be an “A” student. Never give up,” these are the three things one of the girls said she learned from the session



Fifth Grader with President Wallace D. Loh

on admissions at UMD, the most riveting session during the college visits. Derrick Davis, the Assistant Director of Admissions, captured the girls’ full attention during his presentation which lasted about forty minutes. His presentation was so compelling that the girls barely moved in their seats and the silence became another person in the room. Davis started by telling the girls that they should not be “C” students because “C” students get “C” opportunities. He followed up by stating that they cannot afford to be mediocre students. When one of the fifth graders asked what the word mediocre meant, Davis used the word “halfway” and told the fifth grader that a good example is if the girl next to her were running at 100% and she were running at only 50%.

Davis told girls that what sets students apart for college admission is “As” and “Bs” which also helps them receive scholarships. If their grades are mediocre, they will not get scholarships because “C” students do not get “A” opportunities. He told girls to look at their education this way: they are building a house and middle school is the foundation. He said that if they spend as much time on their schoolwork as they do on social media that they would be better students and they should always remember that it would cost them more not to go to college.

“You are better than just being a cashier. There are CEOs, doctors, lawyers in this room,” said Davis. When he asked how many of them knew that they could do better in school, half of the girls raised their hands.

### Meeting with President Wallace D. Loh

“This was one of the best experiences of my life,” said one of the girls about our visit with President Loh, the

thirty-third president of the University of Maryland and its first Asian American president. Born in Shanghai, China, President Loh moved to Peru with his father and then immigrated to the United States. He speaks both Chinese and Spanish.

President Loh graciously met with the girls and was surprised and impressed that they knew so much about him. The girls explained that they had read about him in preparation for their visit. One of them asked how he became president, and he responded that she could think about it as someone who wants to serve as more than just as a teacher becoming the principal of a high school.

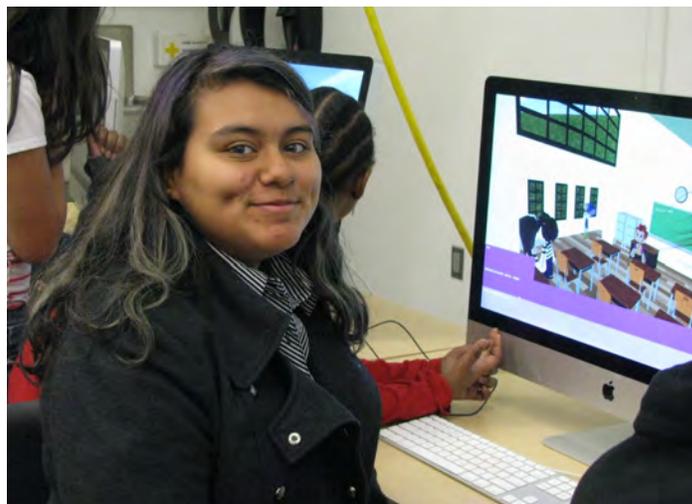
The girls asked the president how many languages he speaks and he urged them to learn other languages and the cultures of those who speak those languages. As they were leaving, the president gave each girl a gift, a book about the university.

### **Our Visit to George Mason University**

Our hosts at George Mason University (GMU) were Dr. LaNitra Berger and Dean Zofia Burr of the Honors College, and Cindy Ayala, one of the young women in SisterMentors, who is currently studying at GMU. Dr. Berger is one of the women SisterMentors helped to earn her doctorate. The girls were welcomed by Dean Burr and Dr. Berger, both of whom talked about the Honors College and their work at the university.

Cindy Ayala had arranged for the girls to participate in classes in the Art Department including a special class by Professor Chris Wren on Game Design. Professor Wren's presentation focused on the lack of women in the industry. He explained that twenty years ago, the target audience for Game Design was a 13-year old male since games were designed for children, instead of adults, and especially not for women.

However, things changed when The Sims game was created, which broke all barriers and gained an audience of more than fifty percent women. Today, the average gamer is more than thirty years old and forty-seven percent of all gamers are women. Professor Wren explained that the gaming industry makes \$25 billion a year and there are very few women game programmers because there are few women in Math and Science, the two fields providing the knowledge needed to be able to program games.



Game Design Workshop at George Mason University

After the presentation, the girls enjoyed playing games on large screen computers. They then attended and participated in other classes in the Art Department, including Drawing, Painting and Digital Animation. "It's artistic and I got to actually participate. I felt like a real student and talked with the professor a lot," said one of the girls after attending classes at GMU.

"SisterMentors is helping my daughter to improve her performance in school. Her mentor, Treda, helps her to stay motivated and encouraged to work harder in school. The college visits have opened her eyes to how to better prepare for college. She is inspiring her younger brothers to work hard and get good grades because they want to follow in her footsteps. Because of the impact of SisterMentors on our daughter, our oldest son recently asked: "Why is there not a BrotherMentors for us?"

Demek Dagnachew  
Sewite Esayas  
Parents of SisterMentors Girl

## News from Our Young Women in College



**Azeb Legesse**

### Fourth Year

#### **Azeb Legesse, Virginia Commonwealth University**

This fall, I will spend the entire semester doing clinical rotations at the laboratory at VCU's School of Medicine and will also have a job in security for the first year dormitories. After I complete this program and graduate in May 2014 with a Bachelor of Science in Clinical Laboratory Science, I intend to take a year off and prepare for the Pharmacy College Admission Test (PCAT). I plan to go to Pharmacy School and earn a Ph.D. in Pharmacology because I would like to do research on how cellular and organ systems function.

Last year, my third year of college, I started the Clinical Laboratory Science program. This program is very rigorous. I had to take lots of science courses, including organic chemistry, hematology, clinical chemistry, immunology and microbiology. I also had to work to help with college expenses so I had a job as a front desk assistant at a library on campus. This past summer, I worked in the hospital laboratory doing Phlebotomy as part of the program requirements.

#### **Maya Simpkins, Virginia Commonwealth University**

I am now a senior at Virginia Commonwealth University where I am double majoring in Gender and Sexuality and African American studies.

This semester is one of the most challenging academically but even with work study as a receptionist I have managed to keep my grades up. I had the opportunity to read one of my research papers at a recent Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALAH) conference and hope to get the paper published.



**Cindy Ayala**

Last spring, I joined a sorority, Sigma Lambda Upsilon (SLU) and have done a lot of community service. I love the sisterhood I have in SLU and the like-minded women. I have also been dancing salsa for about three years and dream of becoming a professional dancer. I hope to make the professional team for the dance company I am with. I also teach salsa classes to kids, travel to dance conferences in different states, and help with choreography for a student salsa organization on campus.

After graduation, I would like to get a certificate in nonprofit management and work on stopping violence against women.

#### **Cindy Ayala, George Mason University**

I am now a senior, and I am very excited. This semester is a great one because of the interesting classes I am taking. After patiently waiting for about a year, I am finally taking 2D Animation! My other classes are: Intro to Web Design, where I learn how to design a website, and Aesthetics, where we discuss topics such as, "What is art?" And more good news, over the summer I received The Catherine Hart Scholarship from the Woman's Club of McLean, Virginia, which I would not have received if it were not for the help of Dr. Lewis, and I am very grateful. Last semester, I made the Dean's list again because of academic excellence and I intend to work hard to continue to make the Dean's List.

### Third Year

#### **Margie Obeng, Pennsylvania State University**

Now that I am entering my third year of college, I am beginning to realize how much I have grown. College has



**Margie Obeng**

given me experiences that, I believe, were made to help me become a stronger person and I'm growing into a more confident woman each day. Penn State has also allowed me to become less shy and much more outgoing. I am no longer afraid to start conversations with people I don't know. My activities on campus include serving as a camp counselor at Outdoor School, as a tutor with Volunteers in Public Schools, as secretary of the African Students Association as well as a new member of Students Engaging Students, a service organization on campus.

I've discovered the importance of deleting certain factors from my life. People will try to bring you down. I've learned how negative thoughts about others will hurt you, so you must surround yourself with positivity. As Gandhi said, "I will not let anyone walk through my mind with their dirty feet."

I am blessed and overwhelmingly grateful to be where I am today, and I look forward to continuing to work toward my degree in Education and Public Policy. I'm more than halfway there now, and I refuse to allow any force --- physical, emotional or mental --- to prevent me from reaching my goal. I'm beyond committed to having a successful junior year. I am sure this year will be my year. Without people like Dr. Lewis, and my mentor Dr. Fanta Aw, I highly doubt that I would appreciate where I am today. I hope that in the future I will impact the lives of other young girls like the women of SisterMentors have impacted mine.

Second Year

**Ledia Yirgu, University of Virginia College at Wise**

This is my second year at UVA-Wise. I am taking



**Ledia Yirgu**

Organizational Leadership, Marketing, Western Civilization, Community and Social Change, and College Algebra. My goal this semester is to get all As and transfer to either Howard University or Radford University. I plan to continue majoring in Business Administration.

First Year

**Gloria Aboagye, Old Dominion University**

I graduated from high school last June and started college this fall. SisterMentors helped me get a scholarship so I do not have to work during my first year of college and can instead focus on my studies. I am very grateful. The past few months at ODU have been great. I have met some interesting people who live in my dorm and some of them are in my classes. I am taking Sociology, Psychology, English, Science, and Math this semester. My school is also close to Norfolk State University and Hampton University so students get to interact with each other. So far I have joined The Class of 2017, which helps decide which activities will earn money for our class. I am enjoying myself at ODU because everyone is calm and nice and I hope it remains this way.

# From the Chair of the Board of Directors of EduSeed

## SisterMentors on the Move: Strategic Planning for Sustainability and Growth

Following on the heels of SisterMentors' 15th Anniversary, the Board of Directors of EduSeed, the umbrella nonprofit organization for SisterMentors, embarked on a several months long strategic planning process to help ensure SisterMentors' sustainability today and beyond. This inspiring and dynamic process produced programmatic, institution-building and funding plans to guide SisterMentors' work and development over the next three years. Outcome goals to be accomplished within that timeframe include raising funds for current operating costs and expansion, adding new staff, and adding more community and civic leaders on the Board of Directors for EduSeed. The demand for SisterMentors' services currently outstrips its capacity to meet the need.

But the strategic plan provides a roadmap for SisterMentors to continue its life-changing work with low income girls and women of color, and build the capacity to grow and increase its impact and reach. Many action items flow from the strategic planning goals, and we are rolling up our sleeves! This next phase of SisterMentors' journey will be transformational and EduSeed and SisterMentors are seeking partners to join us in the journey.

If you or someone you know is interested in: fundraising; serving as a "connector" who can join SisterMentors with others interested in furthering our mission; or serving on EduSeed's very active Board of Directors, please contact us. Thank you!

**Montina M. Cole**

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## Our College Graduates

*continued from page 5*

### Ruhama Yared, Goucher College

I had trouble finding a place to stay in Barbados and SisterMentors put me in touch with people there who helped me find a place and helped me get oriented to the country.

Living in a different country and immersing myself in a completely different culture taught me a lot about myself and gave me more experience than I would have gained had I not studied abroad. One of the most important things I learned was that I love the laid-back way of living. I also learned how to provide for myself since I was all alone without my family to help me.

I am very passionate about education and have always wanted to work with underprivileged children and that is what I am doing as a tutor with first graders and as a fifth grade teacher assistant at a public charter school in Washington, D.C. I am also a math instructor with Johns Hopkins University Center for Talented Youth in a distance program where I teach using email, a web-based interactive whiteboard, and a phone. I am also a tutor in Pre-Calculus for an eleventh grader.

I had been well prepared for teaching while at Goucher with opportunities for lots of teaching experience as a requirement for my Education major. I taught at several public schools in the Baltimore area. I planned lessons and taught Math to fifth graders at one school and taught Math and Science to sixth graders at another.

In the spirit of SisterMentors and to express my gratitude for all they have done for me, I am volunteering to teach Math to one of the SisterMentors girls in sixth grade. I tutor her twice a week and I am helping her prepare for an upcoming standardized test.

"One memory about SisterMentors that I cherish happens at the end of every mentoring session; we all get together and we give each other "gifts," such as courage, hope, and love. I cherish those moments because they show how much we all care about each other and how much we all want each other to succeed."

Ruhama Yared  
Goucher College, Class of 2013

## Thank You Very Much!

Very special thanks to the law firm of Schiff Hardin LLP, including its Diversity Committee. Special thanks to the Managing Partner of Schiff's D.C. office, Sherry Quirk.

Thanks to all of our wonderful donors and supporters, including everyone who supported us at our SisterMentors Discovered: Building the Dream breakfast fundraiser on October 22, including those who made Leadership Gifts and five-year pledges and joined the Dream Builders Society --- Esperanza Anderson and Cassandra Burton; Fanta Aw; LaNitra Berger and Matthew Berger; Zofia Burr; Karen Cooper; Bonnie Thornton Dill; Elaine Ferguson; Tracy Gary; Treda Grayson; Melanie Harrison; Edward Hayes III; Treda Grayson; Thomas Jesulaitis; Glynn Key; Louise Harper Martin; Dawn Nelson; Deborah K.S. Nichols; Leanne Nurse; Winifred Quinn; Ami Scott; Tacy Cook Telego; Robbie Ross Tisch and Dan Tisch; Carolyn Peoples Veiga and Robert Veiga.

Special thanks to American Institutes for Research, PNC Bank, Schiff Hardin LLP and Wiley Rein LLP for sponsoring our October 22 fundraiser. Very special thanks to Firehook Bakery for donating breakfast food.

Special thanks to the Jerry Taylor and Nancy Bryant Foundation, the Meyer Foundation, Crowell & Moring Foundation, Whole Foods Market P Street, the Jefferson Hotel, Alternative Gifts of Greater Washington, and Reverend Sylvia Sumter of Unity of Washington, D.C.

Thanks to President Sidney A. Ribeau and everyone else at Howard University who met with us. Special thanks to Dr. Valarie Turner and Dr. Judi Moore Latta.

Thanks to Dean Bonnie Thornton Dill for hosting us at the University of Maryland College Park and to President Wallace D. Loh for meeting with us. Special thanks to J. Darius Greene for making it happen and to everyone else who helped make our visit a success.

Thanks to Dr. LaNitra Berger, Dean Zofia Burr, professors in the Art Department and everyone else at George Mason University. And thanks to Cindy Ayala for making it happen.

Thanks to everyone who helped make our Discover SisterMentors sessions a success. Thank You!

Many thanks to our wonderful volunteers, including Renae Baird, Jory Barone, Michele Boyd, Mary Helen Coleman, LaShoun Christian, Mignonette Dooley, Lee

Hoffman, May-Ling Joa, Wanda Morris, Dawn Nelson, Ifeoma Nwankwo, Wayne Richardson, Cherri Sinclair, Natalie Turner and Alice Wilkes. Special thanks to Etsegent Firdaweke, Dean Valerie Gregory, John Teschner and Alec Orudjev.

Special thanks to Dora Oduor for her dedication and service.

Thanks to Timothy Boller of Seed IP Law Group for intellectual property representation and Christine Brahmí Romero for the yoga classes for the girls. Thanks also to Yogaville and Kris Miller for providing writing retreat accommodations for the women. Very special thanks to Robbie Ross Tisch for her nonprofit consulting expertise and generosity.

Thanks to Gregory and Anna Brown for their generosity.

Our deepest gratitude to Herbert Posner, a strong supporter of SisterMentors, who passed away in 2012.

And, as always, thanks to the women and girls of SisterMentors for their fortitude and grace.



## Council Recognizes SisterMentors for 15 Years of Service to the District of Columbia and Beyond

The Council of the District of Columbia honored SisterMentors with a Ceremonial Resolution to recognize the program's 15 years of service and dedication to expanding access to educational opportunities for women and girls of color in the community. The resolution, cited as "SisterMentors Recognition Resolution of 2013," took effect on January 8, 2013 in the District of Columbia Register.

"It is no secret that an educational achievement gap exists in this country, and [programs] like SisterMentors are essential in the fight to erase it," said Councilmember Mary M. Cheh (D-Ward 3). "By supporting and mentoring young women as they matriculate through college and graduate school, SisterMentors is providing an invaluable service to our community, and the city is grateful to them for all of their work."

"We are appreciative of the support of the Council of the District of Columbia and Councilmember Cheh and we are honored to receive this recognition from the city we love and are committed to serving," said Dr. Shireen Lewis, Founder of SisterMentors. "Higher education for women of color is our passion and we are looking forward to guiding more young women to achieve their highest potential."



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## SisterMentors' Recent Accomplishments

- SisterMentors received a Ceremonial Resolution from the Council of the District of Columbia to honor the program's fifteenth anniversary.
- We helped 2 more women to earn doctorates bringing to 44 the number of women of color we helped to earn doctorates.
- Four of the young women we helped to send to college have graduated and the others are on track to graduate.
- The Board of Directors of EduSeed, the umbrella organization for SisterMentors, completed a strategic plan which will guide the organization and program for the next three years.
- We took girls to visit Howard University, University of Maryland College Park, and George Mason University.

## PLEASE SUPPORT SISTERMENTORS

I would like to support SisterMentors. My donation will help sustain this program so that it can continue mentoring women and girls of color in their pursuit of higher education.

**Please send your donation by December 31, 2013.**

**Choose this:**

**DONATION BY CHECK**

\_\_\_\_\_ \$500

\_\_\_\_\_ \$300

\_\_\_\_\_ \$250

\_\_\_\_\_ \$175

\_\_\_\_\_ \$150

\_\_\_\_\_ \$100

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\_\_\_\_\_ My employer/company will match my gift.

**Or choose this:**

**ONLINE DONATION**

\_\_\_\_\_ I am making a donation online at [www.sistermentors.org](http://www.sistermentors.org) by clicking the **DONATE NOW** link and following the instructions. I am including my phone number, email, and address.

\_\_\_\_\_ My employer/company will match my gift.

**Or choose this:**

**DONATION THROUGH CFC**

\_\_\_\_\_ My employer is a federal agency or otherwise participates in the Combined Federal Campaign (CFC) of the National Capital Area. I am making my donation through CFC by filling out my employer's pledge form and writing in EduSeed's CFC number which is 90398.

If you would like to make your donation in someone's honor, please let us know.

For donations by check, please use the enclosed envelope, make your check payable to EduSeed and mail to:

EduSeed/SisterMentors  
901 K Street N.W., Suite 700  
Washington, D.C. 20001

**Please remember that your donation is tax deductible.**

## Who We Are

SisterMentors is a project of EduSeed, a nonprofit organization based in Washington, D.C. EduSeed's mission is to promote education among traditionally disadvantaged and underserved communities such as women and people of color. SisterMentors mentors girls of color from low income families in elementary, middle and high school, inspiring them to go to college. The girls are mentored by women of color doctoral students who SisterMentors helps to complete their dissertations and earn their doctorates. The women and girls are African Americans, Latinas, Asian Americans and immigrants.

EduSeed's goal is to help stop the high dropout rate of girls of color and increase the number of women of color doctorates. We believe that doctoral students and Ph.Ds of color are a powerful yet untapped source of inspiration, motivation and knowledge for children of color who are at risk of dropping out of school. We 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 also exist because statistics show that more than 50 percent of doctoral students drop out of their programs, and the numbers are higher for women of color.

We have helped 23 young women to go to college, including to Duke, Goucher, Bates, Virginia Commonwealth University and Northern Virginia Community College and 44 women to earn doctorates, including in Math, Science and Economics.

## EduSeed's Board of Directors

Special thanks to Ashley Scott for her service. EduSeed's current board members are the following:

Montina M. Cole

Thomas Jesulaitis

Shireen K. Lewis

Kris Miller

Marianne Tshihamba

For more information on EduSeed's Board of Directors, please visit [www.eduseed.org](http://www.eduseed.org).

## Donate to Us Through CFC

Our umbrella nonprofit organization, EduSeed, was selected to participate in the Combined Federal Campaign (CFC) this year.

If you are a federal employee or have friends who are federal employees in the Washington, DC area, please ask them to donate to us through CFC. We are listed in the CFC catalog under EduSeed, and our designation number is 90398. Thanks for your support of our work!!!

## EDUSEED/SISTERMENTORS

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