

# It's a Dream come true

## Ravenswood teens succeeding with program's help

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The Ravenswood Dreamers are coming of age.

Ten years ago, an I Have a Dream program was offered to third-graders who lived in the Ravenswood Houses in Long Island City.

The program was started by Eugene Lang in 1981 to provide college tuition assistance to a group of students, then in sixth grade, at Public School 121 in Harlem.

The program has evolved into a 10-to-12-year educational support program for children in low-income communities, for whom the college tuition assistance is only the final piece in a long-term program of scholastic, cultural and leadership guidance.

Eighty children opted into the program at Ravenswood.

"The only prerequisites were that you had to be in the third grade and live in Ravenswood," said Harold Friedman, owner of National Elevator Cab and Door in Woodside and sponsor of the Ravenswood program.

This month, 34 Dreamers will graduate high school with five others earning GEDs. All but three are enrolled in college.

"We anticipate 17 more Dreamers earning either their high school diploma or GED by January 2005, with the expectations of pursuing a college degree afterward," said Friedman.

One child died in a traffic accident, and 10 of the remaining Dreamers are entering the 11th grade, with the remainder either out of school or at unknown locations, he said.

Sandra Guerra, 17, graduated on Thursday from the High School of Economics and Finance in lower Manhattan. She is headed to Lake Forest College in Illinois.

Guerra remembers the various outings the Dreamers took and the tutoring she got at the Ravenswood Community Center or the one-bedroom Ravenswood apartment the program calls home, courtesy of the city's Housing Authority.

Throughout high school, her teachers thought she was good in math, she said.

"I am not, and they would put me in accelerated classes and I would struggle, so I would come here for help," she said, as she sat in the community center.

This past year she took an accelerated calculus program equivalent to first year calculus in college.

She also took two semesters of general psychology at Pace University.



BILL TURNBULL

It's hard to tell who's happier, "I Have a Dream" beneficiaries (standing, l. to r.) Kamel Anderson, Nelson Villa, Marc Pongnon, Brandie Johnson and Sandra Guerra, or (seated, l. to r.) project coordinator Thierry Cazeau, Harold Freedman and Ingrid Horowitz.

On Friday, Brandie Johnson, 17, graduated from Long Island City High School. She's headed to the Art Institute of Atlanta for a culinary arts degree.

"When I first started high school, my average wasn't too good at all, but I noticed every term my average went up," she said. "It was because of the great tutor I had here."

Others, like Nelson Villa and Kamel Anderson have taken different roads toward college.

"High school was not working out," said Villa, 17.

Now working at a fast food restaurant, he will begin a 10-month stint in City Year, a

nonprofit, national service program for young people. He will be helping other inner-city kids after school.

During the 10 months City Year will offer help to the teen to get his GED.

"We always had a goal as far as I am concerned to treat the needs of all the children in the program at the education range and the maturity range whatever they may be at," said Friedman.

"At the end of the day the most important thing was to produce for themselves the ability to be productive and to keep themselves going forward at different rates. Children are going

to go at different rates. We don't want to leave anybody behind. Nelson is not going to be left behind," said the sponsor.

Anderson, 17, was "another person who thought high school didn't work for me. I thought it was a waste of time for me. It wasn't a place for me."

He dropped out and went into the Job Corps. He got his GED and went to a university for a semester, but said it was too restricting. He plans to go to LaGuardia Community College in September.

"By going to LaGuardia, hopefully after the two years, I will be able to get a scholarship and be able to go away to college," said

Anderson, who is interested in the computer field.

The project coordinator of the Ravenswood Dreamers is a product of Ravenswood.

"Every day is a treat coming to work because I get a chance to walk through the neighborhood I grew up in," said Thierry Cazeau. "It is like going back to my childhood."

"These kids who are now in my position 15 years ago, about to do things I did and hopefully, we will let them know what the pitfalls are," added Cazeau, a graduate of Aviation High School and SUNY at Stony Brook.

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