

Sapphira Harewood

Life is filled with opportunities. Yet, we still have serious educational inequality in America, including an academic gap that grows wider between white children and poor minority children like me. Decades after landmark legislation to end the injustice of segregation, we still have too many children locked outside of the doors to opportunity, with no way in to the mainstream of American life. There are many young people who recognize that they are failing despite the significant amounts of money and effort spent by policy makers, taxpayers, and educators to improve young peoples' prospects in life by fixing their schools. Just around the corner, there is a countless amount of inner city youth who are sectioned off to their own neighborhoods, where they only see poverty, teenage pregnancy, violence, crime, illiteracy that increase each and every day. There are those few who hold on to a dream that one day we will change not only our lives for the better but be able to help develop our culture, our people, our neighborhoods, and our world.

Coming from one the toughest areas of Brooklyn, New York is not easy. As therapeutic exercise I have traveled to many different parts of New York City and have seen that there is a lot more to life than what I see in my community day after day. By these adventures, I helped to create and began to look forward to my goals and dreams. I did not know how it would transpire, but I believed that there would be a package tagged "Special opportunity delivery for Sapphira." Maybe it would be from a long lost friend or Santa Claus but it had meaning. As

for me, that package came when I got accepted to the FDNY Exploring Program and The Joseph A. Forgione Development School for Youth.

The Fire Department of New York Exploring Program gives high school students, aged 14 to 20, the opportunity to gain insight into a fire and emergency services career and develop a road map for their future. As a member of this program I have made contacts that will broaden my employment options, and I have developed leadership skills. Being an explorer I have seen how important it is to savor the people you meet, the friendships you create, and the lives you touch along the way, and to maintain a positive outlook on life.

The Development School for Youth is a branch program of the All Stars Project, which has been creating new kinds of programs dedicated to promoting the social and cultural development of young people living in poverty for 25 years. After listening to a powerful and exciting presentation by the director of youth programs, Pamela Lewis, I was determined to be part of the upcoming class. I arrived at my interview for the program, and was surprised and relieved to see other young timid youths dressed in professional attire just like me. In the interview, we all agreed that we wanted to understand the professional world and to become better public speakers for youths around the world. We wanted to have the opportunity to challenge our assumptions about who we thought we were, who others thought we were, and who we actually can be in the world. During our series of weekly leadership training workshops led by senior executives we were introduced to the worlds of finance, advertising, accounting,

law and other leading industries, at companies such as Merrill Lynch, Goldman Sachs, Source Media, and Ernst & Young. As young adults, we created new performances of ourselves that will help us successfully negotiate the business environment and interact with adults on a professional level. We actively changed people's perspectives that inner-city youth do not "fit" in a corporate environment.

On May 22, 2007 I graduated from DSY, and was confirmed as an ambassador of developmental growth. I began to think about all the ways that I would be able to influence the lives of others, since I was given the opportunity for doors to be opened in numerous ways. The students who graduate from the program are placed in paid full time summer internships, and I interned at Ernst & Young's Transfer Pricing group. Presenting a PowerPoint presentation to a room filled with employees, attending staff meetings, and even attending summer events held at Chelsea Piers and Rockefeller Café, were great experiences for me.

The doors of opportunity are revolving. You just have to know when to take a chance and step in the door! In the fall of 2008, I will be attending SUNY College at Brockport, where I look forward to doing a double major in education physiology and business, and perhaps a minor in communications. I plan to obtain my Masters degree within five years, and continue on to my PhD. Also, I want to be involved in college as a mentor and tutor. The Hesus Fund scholarship will help me achieve these goals. Thank you!