



A BETTER CHANCE IN DARIEN, inc.
P.O. BOX 3204 • DARIEN, CONNECTICUT 06820

WINTER NEWSLETTER 1986

Dear Friends,

The ranks at 11 Brookside Road have been swelled - Resident Directors Gary and Sharon White are the proud new parents of a baby girl. Little Krysten White entered the world and joined the ABC household in December. Congratulations to Sharon and Gary and a warm welcome to Krysten!

Pictured below, the happy parents and peaceful child, with Resident Tutor Liza McFeely, Jackie, Shelley and Marcelle looking on.

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student news

Much of the talk at the ABC house these days is centered on "COLLEGE". With one senior - Khisha Pratt, and five Juniors - Shelley Dugas, Marcelle Wilson, Denise Richards and Jackie Cancell, the reality of life beyond the ABC program is beginning to take root. The girls are working well and keeping their grades up to the level expected of them. They have visited a few colleges and are presently taking an SAT prep course at the highschool. Khisha has her college applications in and, like many seniors, is anxiously waiting to hear. News of her choice of school will be in the Spring Newsletter.

Recently, some media attention has been focused on the ABC program in Darien. A New York Times article, "In Darien Church, Genteel Regrets And Apologies for Prejudiced Past" (Jan. 23) featured interviews with Darien people among whom were our ABC students. The Times reporter visited the ABC house and a photographer took pictures. Basic information about the program as well as some quotes from the girls were used in the article as one angle on the broader topic of prejudice. Cablevision has scheduled an interview with Sharon White and the students early in March. (Anyone interested in seeing this should call Sharon for the date.) Also, in the January issue of the highschool student magazine "Communique" an article on the program was featured.

host families

* Their contribution to ABC *

Every Sunday and one weekend a month during the school semester the ABC students go to the homes of their host families. It is part of the ABC program - a part of integral value both to the student and her host.

The five current host families share some thoughts about why they volunteered, how they spend time together and the ups and downs of being a host family.

The Maces - host family to Khisha Pratt. From left, David, Rosalie Hull (Rosemary's mother), Jonathon and Rosemary.



* People volunteer for different reasons. The Paul Tillers feel that their being "new to this country and specifically to Darien" was a factor. "We have gone through many adjustments and we felt that perhaps we could help someone go through a transition." The Geoffrey Magnaths consciously made the decision to be a host family as a family - "the four of us together." Occasionally a friendship is begun at school - the Paul Williamsons's daughter Mary and Marcelle had classes together and were both active in Amica. "Mary heard that Marcelle was going to need a new host family and asked us if we'd be willing." The David Mace's started out being a back-up host family. "We knew the ongoing success of the ABC program depended on volunteers."

* The ABC students seem to respond well to being treated as regular members of the family. A combination of spending time just being with the family, watching T.V., listening to music, talking, reading, sleeping, having friends over, etc., as well as going out and doing things. The Walter Raleighs feel that Jackie enjoys family outings - "visiting daughter Kimberly at Yale, the Oysterfest, going fishing ... learning to drive in the highschool parking lot." Khisha takes part in all family activities at the Maces and when she goes there for the weekend "we try to do something special ... eating out ... a movie, or going to NYC." For Shelley, Sunday night dinners at the Magraths are special "usually the only time on the weekend we are all together." Time spiced with a little individual attention pays off, too. "One afternoon when everyone was busy Marcelle and I went to a movie together. I think she enjoyed that one-on-one," says Gail Williamson. "Denise is a very easy young lady and is willing to fit in (the Tiller household) beautifully. We do not plan activities ... what comes we do or don't." Be it "cross-country skiing, playing tennis with (son) Simon," or "just lying in the sun."

* The benefits of being a host family seem to far outweigh any of the difficulties. However, initially when the families and their ABC students are just getting acquainted, it takes a little time and effort. For the Williamsons it's been a relatively simple process, they haven't had to make any real changes in their normal routine largely because daughter Mary is so involved. All the families though, have their own ways of doing things. At the Maces "Khisha had to adjust to our family rules - different from her own." Shelley "would be happier if we did more together ... but we just don't," says Barb Magrath. "With (our own) two teenagers who have different interests and involvements, it's hard." They had hoped, for example, that Shelley and daughter Julie would become "instant friends" but instead, son Scott and Shelley have more to share, being in some classes together. Being a host family means temporarily adopting a child, and Sally Raleigh believes "the difficulties of being a host family are really the difficulties of being a mother or father. Each child in your family is an enormous responsibility, an emotional experience, joy and conflict, help and hindrance."

* The host families all feel that their lives have been enriched by the experience. "We have the joy of knowing and loving an 'adopted daughter'" says Rosemary Mace. "We feel great satisfaction in knowing a girl is being given a chance to succeed and that we are a small part of that process. Khisha has brought a new perspective to our family." The Magraths feel that they have learned about Shelley's background, "how very different that was from Darien" and "it has been good for the children to see how hard someone will work for something they really want." One senses a closeness, a genuine caring among the families in their host role. The Fall Denise went to the Tillers, their daughter Sandrine left for Johns Hopkins - "It feels to us as if our daughter never left." And the Raleighs - "We can't imagine life without Jackie ... We have the gift of another child who is kind and gentle and loving and funny and silly and exasperating and beautifully mannered."

The host families have back-up families who step in when something unforeseen comes up such as a travelling conflict, illness, etc. The Bruce Burrows, Bernard Gilmores, David Labsons, William Fraziers and Thomas Albanis play essential roles in being back-up families - there

to help out when needed.

Being a host family to an ABC student is, unquestionably, a commitment. But the rewards appear to be worth it. The enthusiasm and positive feelings generated by our five host families is evidence of this and the ABC program in Darien is substantially richer for their contribution.

THE DOLLARS AND CENTS OF IT ALL

ABC's 1986 Fund Drive is about to get under way. This year our imaginative Finance Committee has come up with an alternative to the regular donation. The Zero Coupon Bond. In essence, this plan will give something back to its contributors! See below.

ZERO COUPON BONDS

"For a \$500 pledge, say, you will not only receive the Zero Coupon Bond, but also take a tax deduction.

What you do with the bond is entirely up to you. Some have willed their bonds to their children and grandchildren, while others have decided to keep them for themselves.

Whatever the case, in years to come when the bonds mature and pay out 10 times their present face value, you or your children will have a good feeling about the help your bond gave to ABC in Darien."

Minority inner-city families need programs like ABC. Their bright young children deserve 'a better chance' to expand their educational options. ABC in Darien gives this chance. It is a quality program, well run and imbued with real vision for the future.

'Til Spring then, all the best.

Sandra Filmer
Editor