



**A BETTER CHANCE IN DARIEN, inc.**

**P.O. BOX 3204 • DARIEN, CONNECTICUT 06820**

# ***NEWSLETTER***

**WINTER 88**

## **We're making a difference ...**

Dear Friends of ABC,

The October 26th U.S. News and World Report article on American colleges included a startling statement:

*"America's college presidents share some key concerns about the health of higher education in the United States. One of them: The steady drop in applications from black and Hispanic students. Notes Daniel Chamberlain, president of Houghton College in upstate New York, 'The percentage of minority students is increasing in our society and decreasing in our colleges. We must do more to prepare such students for college and also provide them with incentives and assistance for attending college.'"*

A Better Chance, the oldest and only national program of its kind, is preparing students to go on to achieve their fullest academic potential at the most challenging colleges and universities in the nation. I attended the 25th anniversary dinner of ABC in New York in December and learned that 60% of students in the U.S. attend college. Yet only one in eight in the inner city goes on to college, and only one in four of those who go to college graduates. ABC has enabled 4,000 minority students to graduate from college and the majority of ABC students have gone on to graduate school as well.

This issue of our newsletter will introduce the six outstanding girls currently at the Darien ABC house, and a spring issue will bring you up-to-date on the first five Darien ABC girls. Our "first graduates" came to our program seven years ago and will be graduating from college this year. Through your voluntary and monetary efforts, ABC is enabling inner city minority students to graduate from our high school and succeed in college. Their success and that of the other girls who have come through our program in Darien would not be possible without your support. Thank you.

*Rosemary H. Mace*

Rosemary H. Mace, President  
ABC Board of Directors





Edwina Chapman, grade 11



Sohui Kim, grade 10

Who  
living

II Brookside



Cielo Irizarry, grade 9

...Six students at Darien High School, along with two resident directors, a resident tutor, and a dinner-time cook... Not your typical Darien "family"? The residents of 11 Brookside Road consider their daily life at the house more like "family" than they had anticipated, and that has been a happy surprise.

It was a surprise because each of the six young women came here excited about what they would find and a bit apprehensive about being "on their own." They had each made the difficult decision to spend their high school years in an unfamiliar place, apart from their families.

Our "ABC girls" were born in such diverse places as Seoul, Korea, and the Bronx, New York, but they all grew up in the New York City area. What they shared, even before knowing one another, was a commitment to getting a fine high school education--"a better chance"--in Darien.

#### Guidance counselors pave the way

Our eleventh graders, Edwina Chapman from Brooklyn and Julie Leung from Manhattan's Chinatown, applied to ABC through guidance counselors at their former schools.

"I didn't get into ABC the first round," Edwina recalled. Even though Edwina spent her freshman year at a special public high school for gifted students in Brooklyn, she wanted ABC badly enough to risk applying again--and made it as a sophomore.

Julie wasn't included in her guidance counselor's meeting about ABC because she wasn't in the top 10% of her class. But she knew about it through two friends who were in ABC. Julie said, "When I went to my counselor and asked to apply, he got as excited about the idea as I was."

One of our ninth graders, Alexa ("Chachi") Aviles, also came to ABC because her guidance counselor at her Brooklyn public school suggested applying. Her mother, with whom she is quite close, helped her get over the fear of leaving home.

#### Other routes to ABC

Two of the girls, Sohui Kim and Okwui Okpokwasili, both tenth graders, have been friends since third grade. With two older brothers as ABCers, Okwui convinced Sohui to apply when the girls were in eighth grade in public school in the Bronx.

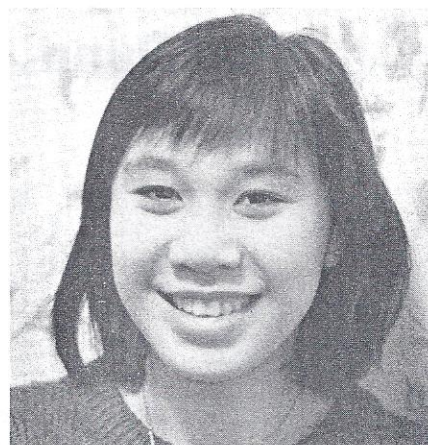
Cielo Irizarry, a ninth grader from Manhattan, had to go all the way to California to hear about ABC. During a visit there, a close family friend urged Cielo to apply. "I wanted to do it," she said. "My parents weren't so sure."



# 's at e Road?



Okwui Okpokwasili, grade 10



Julie Leung, grade 11

## How they find it

All the girls anticipated having to work hard academically, and their expectations were correct. The standards for academic performance are set by the National Board of ABC:

- o In the first year, a 2.6 average is the minimum.

- o In subsequent years, students must achieve at least a 3.0, or B average.

But they express real appreciation for the learning experience here. When Julie said, "The teachers care so much about their students at DHS," the others were quick to agree.

In addition, this particular group of ABCers has become involved in many extracurricular activities. Julie, Sohui, and Okwui were managers for the varsity field hockey team this fall. In addition, Sohui plays clarinet with the concert band and is a member of "Refuge," a gospel singing-with-a-message group directed by Keith Shawgo of DHS.

Edwina currently works at the Printing Center after school. She and Sohui were on the varsity softball team last spring, and plan to play again this spring along with Julie, who will try out as well. Edwina, Alexa, and Cielo played on the varsity volleyball team this fall and Alexa is now on varsity basketball.

Okwui is active in Theatre 308, and was student assistant to the director of "Close Ties," the play that won the New England drama competition for DHS last fall. She is also in an improvisation group with Youth Options and in the DHS concert choir.

Julie now works at a local law office for two hours after school Monday through Friday. She is also



Alexa Aviles, grade 9

co-president of Amica, a welcoming club at DHS for new students. Alexa and Sohui are Amica members as well. Unselfish giving of time is also a part of these girls' lives. The girls have volunteered their time for many school fund-raising activities.

It's hard to find a reflective moment with all the activity in and out of the ABC house. But these girls believe they've grown and benefitted significantly by joining ABC in Darien. As Sohui expressed it, "It's quite an idea to put a group of girls in a house to live together in an all-white neighborhood. Although there are tough moments, I've learned so much about myself and about what's going on around me. As I've been forced to think and to consider others' views, I've changed and been enriched. I think we'll all be prepared to cope with further changes in college--perhaps more so because of our experiences here." ■



## Meet June Dunn, resident tutor



June Dunn

ABC's resident tutor is "home grown." June Dunn moved to Darien at age 7 and went through Hindley,

Mather, and DHS.

June went on to U.Conn., where she majored in English and assisted at the writing center. A strong background in teaching reading and writing has always been a priority for resident tutors at ABC.

Having had a rocky path academically herself, June knows how far to push her charges. "I was placed in extra-help tutoring because I tested poorly in second grade," June recalls. "Until I was in tenth grade, I didn't think I could achieve academically. A lot of encouragement by a few

wonderful teachers turned me around."

From thinking college would be too big a mountain to climb, June not only graduated, but put herself through by working when she wasn't in class. She's the first generation of her family to graduate from college.

June learned about ABC by becoming close friends with Toni Frost, one of the first ABCers in Darien. "I love being a part of this special family," she said. ABC's resident tutor knows what it's like to put yourself on the line, risk failure, and come out a winner. ■



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A big THANK YOU to all who give so generously to ABC!! You make it happen ... You make it WORK.