

The Abell Report

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Volume 2, Number 2

What we think about, and what we'd like you to think about

Published as a community service by The Abell Foundation

Some Recent Grants By The Abell Foundation

Associated Catholic Charities/
St. Vincent's Center \$60,000

toward the purchase of a 5-6 bedroom home in the Baltimore community to provide children infected with HIV virus a home-like family environment, in cooperation with the University of Maryland and Johns Hopkins Hospitals.

At Jacob's Well \$25,140
for the purchase and insurance of a van, and matching grant for start-up office expenses.

Baltimore City Public Schools/
HOSTS \$83,160

to set up an after-school tutorial program for 120 students in one middle school and one elementary school to receive two hours a week of one-on-one tutoring to reach grade level in reading within three years.

The Bryn Mawr School \$10,872

to cover the cost of a pilot reading program to provide 72 hours of intensive instruction for 24-30 Baltimore City 3rd and 4th grade girls in a collaborative public/private school team-teaching opportunity to encourage a sense of enthusiasm for reading.

Chesapeake Bay Foundation \$4,850

planning grant toward the production of a grant proposal for a "state of the Bay" report.

Chesapeake Bay Trust/Baltimore City Forestry Board \$5,000

toward publishing costs of Baltimore City Forest Conservancy District Board's quarterly newsletter, "City, Forest and Trees," to promote urban forests and street trees and to educate the public on the importance and benefits of trees.

Friends of the Family \$75,000

for staffing costs of a training director and assistant, and program related costs to develop comprehensive training program for service providers working with children 0-3 and their parents.

Intervention with P.A.C.T. \$20,000

for start-up costs and first year operation of a five-day, eight-hour-per-day, mainstreamed day care demonstration project for 12-24 handicapped/high risk infants and toddlers.

The Jemicy School \$15,500

toward a two-week summer residency training program for ten classroom and special education teachers from Baltimore City Public Schools in techniques of the Orton-Gillingham method of teaching learning disabled students.

The Black Student Experience in Baltimore's White Independent Private Schools: Is It a Path to Success?

In Baltimore, scores of black students at every level of the socioeconomic scale are enrolled in largely white private schools; they appear to be doing well. Students, schools, families and community all stand to gain.

"By allowing the opportunity for higher education to depend so largely on the individual's economic status, we are not only denying to millions of young people the chance in life to which they're entitled, we are also depriving the nation of a vast amount of political leadership and potential social competence which it sorely needs."

"Higher Education For American Democracy"

A Commission Report of the Truman Administration (1947)

"Able students who can afford to enter higher education's upper echelon will enjoy for much of their lives the economic and social benefits derived from that association."

"Unequal Opportunity: Higher education in America"

Barbara Vobejda, Washington Post (May 3, 1989)

Keefe Clemons graduated from Gilman and Princeton and is going on to study at Oxford and on his return will enter Harvard Law -- a time-honored educational pattern familiar enough within a certain establishment culture. But Keefe Clemons is black, born in poverty to a 17-year old unmarried mother in West Baltimore, raised as a preschooler with the indignities and trauma of abuse at home and in a foster home. Conventional wisdom holds that with such a background and at his age, 22, Keefe would have been lost among the dropped-out and drugged-out populations. But he is not -- far from it; today, he is a bright and productive, accomplished and achieving student in a prestigious university, respected by his teachers and his peers, and with a promising future. After a young lifetime spent overcoming the odds against its happening, he will undoubtedly take his place in society as a responsible and perhaps leading citizen.

Keefe Clemons is one of dozens of young men and women in the Baltimore community who are the products of programs that identify black students in inner-city schools, some of whom are "low-income," and then give them the opportunity (on scholarship) to become enrolled in one of Baltimore's private schools. The programs began in the early 1960s when public consciousness was focused on affirmative action. Now, after some 25 years, it seems appropriate for the community that created and paid for the programs to examine the results. Who are these students, and what has happened to them, and to what extent can it be said that any one program has impacted these students' educational and life experiences in a positive way, and to what degree? And do the results suggest that more community resources be committed to expanding and enriching these programs?

Clemons remembers that as a small child he lived with his mother and her parents in their West Baltimore home. Following a family argument, his mother took him to live alone with her in a few dark and tiny rooms in the same neighborhood. His mother was on welfare, and when it became apparent to visiting social workers that she was abusing Keefe, they took him from her. They moved him to a foster home, where, ironically, he continued to be abused -- this time by his foster mother. He recalls, "My real mother would lock me in a closet or tie me into a chair. I was constantly beaten; my hands were held under scalding water; once my arm was pulled so quickly behind my back that it snapped. My foster

The social worker wondered about Keefe. "He seemed so . . . different, verbal, curious, alert."

mother abused me not only physically but psychologically. She constantly blamed me for whatever went wrong in the house, whether I was responsible or not." Keefe was attending the first grade in the neighborhood elementary school when one of the social workers, Mary Costello, a very unique person with the Child Protective Services Division of the Baltimore City Department of Social Services, became convinced that Keefe was an unusual child. She wondered about him: "He seemed so different -- verbal, curious, alert, imaginative. He was always asking questions."

Costello sensed that Keefe had what it took to go beyond the education that she believed an inner-city public school would provide, and to take advantage of it. On her own initiative, she took him to Redmond Finney, the headmaster of Gilman School.

"At that time, in the early 70s," Finney recalls, "we were looking to get black kids into our lower school. Keefe tested high, and seemed very promising, and we admitted him. But adjusting for him was tough, and he got into more than his share of fights. Yet, it worked out. He went on to become active in student life, and excelled in track, football and cross country, and was elected by his peers to leadership positions in campus life."

Gilman provided tuition and supplies. For his first two years at Gilman, Ms. Costello, at her own expense, picked Keefe up each day to take him to Gilman by 8:00 a.m. and drove him home afternoons. The Department of Social Services eventually had him taken to and from school by taxi until fifth grade, when he used public transportation.

Looking back and evaluating his experience, Keefe feels strongly that it provided him with an unexpected, and critical, "exposure to the middle-class world" -- and apparently changed his life in a very positive way. "The only white people those kids trapped in inner city neighborhoods ever see are rent collectors and meter readers. They do not have in their community or in their families professionals and established businessmen to role-model after. To make it, these kids need to see the other options that are out there, beyond the ones offered on the streets. Gilman gave me that exposure."

The programs -- those identifying black, low-income students for scholarship placement into private schools -- have been profiled nationally, and their experience has been the subject of at least two widely circulating books, "Best Intentions" (Anson, Vintage Press, 1988) and "Visible Now: Blacks In Private School" (Slaughter and Johnson, Greenwood Press, Westport, CT).

In Baltimore, one person who has an excellent view of how such efforts are faring is Greg Roberts, himself black and the executive director of Baltimore Education Scholarship Trust (BEST). The organization is an outgrowth of Baltimore Project For Black Students, and was founded by a number of independent-school headmasters and civic leaders. It currently has enrolled and

funded, in the area's 16 private schools, 121 black students, many of whom are low-income. Roberts has helped to identify the students, fund them, monitor them -- and he shares with schools, family and community the highly visible results of the program's effectiveness, and his own personal energy, judgment and skills in administering it. He is full of optimism -- and of hard facts to support it.

"As to those who would argue that these programs are not working, I couldn't disagree more," he says. "We stay very close to each of these students as they move through the program. I can tell you, the record shows that when these students graduate, they are very admissible into the better colleges.

"It is true, the experience is not for every student. It works best for those students who not only have good academic ability, but have the kind of personality that will allow them to make the transition, from the poor world to the rich, from life in the street to life in the establishment.

"I would caution against over-optimism. There are problems."

"Of 121 students currently in our program, eight have already completed it, and have graduated from high school. All eight are now in college -- or 100% of the high school graduates in the program.

"But I would caution against over-optimism. There are many problems, and there have been those who dropped out, or for one reason or another didn't finish up. The program only works when there is substantial support -- in the school by faculty and students; in the home by family and siblings. And in the school there must be a critical mass of black students, black activities, and subjects in the curriculum that recognize black culture.

"And yes, the problem of 'becoming white' in front of sometimes-taunting peers, of the schizophrenia some black students talk of experiencing --

these are very real problems. But we deal with them. We work with the student, the school and the family. The relatively small number of failures does not, cannot, negate the value of the programs overall. In our society, I feel it would be dangerous to deny opportunity to these students for any reason.

"As of now, all of our students in each of the private schools are doing very well -- we know that. We have more than 600 applications from students and their families attempting to get in the program! Does that sound like a program that is not working?"

Linwood Bridgeforth is black and a junior at the McDonogh School. He is a solid-B student with plans -- realistic it would appear -- to enter the Naval Academy and study aerospace engineering. He was born and raised (and is still living) in the inner city on Collington Avenue in East Baltimore. His route into mainstream society differs sharply from Keefe Clemons's; nonetheless, it is one he had to travel to make it. Given the kind of student he has turned out to be, more than likely he will give back to the community in generous measure what the community gave to him.

His mother is an x-ray technician; his father has a secure position with the United States Post Office. Growing up, he remembers his household as well-ordered and intact, with caring parents who, Linwood recalls, "taught us, always, right from wrong, in a neighborhood where it was easy to go wrong, and a lot of kids do." When he reached school age he was enrolled in St. Matthew's, at Loch Raven and Woodbourne Avenue -- a Catholic school which preached discipline and practiced integration. In his years in St. Matthew's, up until the eighth grade when he left to enter McDonogh, he recalls being "a straight A student." His record and his promise was not lost on his mother, who had studied the programs available to Linwood that would allow him to be admitted (and to be funded) into one of the area's private schools. She discovered the Black Student Project (forerunner of BEST), and by following the agency's process, saw a qualified Linwood admitted into the McDonogh School.

Linwood sees programs that put inner-city blacks into the academic and social worlds of the establishment private schools as leading to entrance into establishment business and civic worlds. "Once, as a black, you get over the problems of adjusting to the different environment, then you get to enjoy and take advantage of the exposure the opportunity gives you."

As for the difficulties, the walking astride two worlds the programs call for, "They are there, but at McDonogh they have a system where the older black kids help the younger. In the time I have been at McDonogh, I have not seen a single racial incident, or one kid in the program flunk out."

"Does the program work? Most of our experience has been positive."

Fifteen-year-old Jo'nita Pearce is black, born and raised as one of six children in a one-parent household in inner-city neighborhoods of West Baltimore, and for part of those years in a housing project; she is now a ninth grade student at Bryn Mawr. Last year this time she was a student in the Booker T. Washington Middle School at 1301 McCulloh Street; today, with A's and B's, she is talking about going on to Harvard and Harvard Law.

In her case, it was her mother, working at a low-paying job and on welfare assistance, who provided the energy that ultimately brought Jo'nita to the attention of Bryn Mawr. Impressed with her child's grades and commitment to school work, she studied the academic and financial opportunities open to the family; by good fortune as it turned out, at the time in 1987 that Jo'nita was looking for Bryn Mawr, Bryn Mawr was looking for Jo'nita.

It has been a fortunate match -- at least, so far. Jo'nita speaks with confidence, and perhaps with some defensiveness, of her ability to handle both

the academic and social challenges that are peculiar to her situation on the campus. "I don't have a lot of time to worry about it," she says. "I work hard and I seem to have a lot of friends in the school. Students like me who do what I'm doing have to expect to make certain sacrifices -- you work harder, you give more time to school work and school play."

Bodie Brizendine, director of admissions, says that Jo'nita is as good as her word, and has the record to show for it. "But the experience presents its problems. Recently, when the students came back from spring vacation, talking about having been to Florida and skiing, some asked Jo'nita where she had spent her vacation. She said, 'I stayed home and relaxed.' It was her way of handling the situation.

"But we have our failures. Some of the kids have had no orientation to discipline, academic or social. It's not that they don't fit; they decide that they don't want to fit. So they drop out.

"Does the program work -- do these black youngsters, be they low-income or at-risk or perhaps both, make it through the private school system and break through to the establishment, and get to enjoy the benefits of that world? Do students, family, school and community gain? Though it may be too early to say, most of our experience has been positive. And it's not just the students and the schools that gain, the community, too, has stood to gain."

Damon Kinard is a black 16-year-old junior at Friends School. He was born and raised in the neighborhoods in and around Memorial Stadium. His mother is a vocational rehabilitator with the State of Maryland.

Damon started school at Montebello, left for a short time to attend a Baltimore County elementary school, then returned to the city where he attended Moravia Park Elementary and then Northeast Middle School. "I always seemed to have good grades," he says. Friends School thought so, too, and took notice; and when he was 13, the school identified him as a candidate for financial aid, and he was admitted into the eighth grade. He says, "My grades fell right away."

Danion has adjusted well to the private school world of Friends School -- with, he will tell you, the support of his family, his classmates and the school. "I always wanted to move from street life to campus life, and Friends and the program gave me that chance. It is two worlds -- the world of the neighborhoods and the world of the private school campus, but I find I am comfortable in both. Ten percent of my class is black, and I play football, basketball and lacrosse, and I go to all the school parties. My grades stay up, I have a lot of friends, black and white. For me, it all works.

"But I have seen as many failures in these programs as I have seen successes. The kids who fail almost always fail because they simply have decided that they don't want to be called 'snobs' by their friends in the neighborhood. They don't like the image of being a part of this particular environment. That is their choice.

"But I have chosen to stay with the program. That is my choice."

*Park School has a
second generation
of the program at work.*

Rahsan Lindsey and his mother, Marsha Moore, make up the dramatic story of two generations of the idea at work -- the first time in the mid-sixties for Marsha Moore; again, 20 years later for Ms. Moore's son, Rahsan.

Rahsan was born and raised in several black, city neighborhoods, including the West Lexington street area and the neighborhoods around Auchentoroly Terrace, near Druid Hill Park in West Baltimore. When he was 13 years old he entered Park School, coming out of Calvin Rodwell Elementary, Guilford Elementary, Ss. Philip and James, and St. James and John, into the world of the independent private school right on schedule -- his, his mother's and Park's. Rahsan was raised for the experience: his mother, 20 years earlier while a student living in West Baltimore and in Harlem Park Junior High, herself entered Park School in the 10th grade -- as a candidate selected by another pro-

gram functioning at that time known as "T. N. T." She graduated from Park and went on to graduate from Vassar College.

Rahsan seems to recall that he always went to schools that were racially mixed, and the Park School milieu was an extension of the one he had known in the Catholic schools he attended earlier. "So I was comfortable at Park, and so were the other black kids -- none that I know of dropped out. And what I did find is that aside from getting a better education, through smaller classes and more personal attention to my strengths, I got to meet people I would not ordinarily meet. I found out what the rest of the world is like, and what new opportunities are out there."

* * *

The question for the black students, and for the involved schools, families and communities, is how the change from inner-city school to largely white private school affects the students' comfort level socially, and, perhaps, ability to perform academically.

This question was the subject of a recent study by the Center for Urban Affairs and Policy Research at Northwestern University. The study is represented to be the first to examine the school success of low-income blacks living in white suburbs (and attending mostly white, middle-to-upper-income family public schools). Conclusions, though mixed, are generally positive; its central finding is that "black children who moved from the low-income areas of Chicago to predominantly white suburbs (and into its public schools) have adjusted well."

Other findings:

- * Although anticipated problems of racial discrimination and vast socioeconomic differences have occurred, the children are maintaining average grades in suburban public schools, have been accepted socially, and are involved in more extracurricular activities than they were in their previous schools.
- * The black children are able to maintain their grades, despite the suburban schools' higher standards.

Some Recent Grants By The Abell Foundation

Investing in Baltimore Committee \$35,000
seed funding for first year of operating to cover cost of staffing and program-related expenses for development of programs to identify employment opportunities in the Baltimore region; the purpose is to strengthen minority recruitment and retention of black professionals in the corporate sector and to motivate black youths in secondary schools and colleges to develop career goals.

Johns Hopkins University/Institute for Policy Studies \$75,000
toward the cost of a one-year, statewide, in-depth and systematic descriptive study of Department of Juvenile Services' field staff's workload.

Maryland Film Commission \$25,000
toward planning and implementing a conference to launch the development of an American Film Institute four-week summer workshop (summer of 1990) for 12 minority filmmakers.

Maryland Society of Professional Engineers \$1,000
toward the 1989 MATHCOUNTS coaching and competition program for 7th and 8th grade students in Maryland.

Mergenthaler Vocational School \$2,000
in recognition of a cross-aged tutoring project involving learning disabled tutors in reading and math for 1st and 2nd graders at Montebello Elementary School to encourage increased academic achievement and self-esteem.

Park West Medical Center \$36,998
two-year funding for the "\$-A-Day" Pregnancy Prevention Program to help prevent and delay pregnancies by providing weekly sessions focused on building self-esteem and decision-making skills.

Roland Park Country School \$16,000
to underwrite the cost of a four-week summer workshop for 40 elementary and middle school teachers from Baltimore City Public Schools, Association of Independent Maryland Schools, and the Archdiocese Schools to develop math curriculum integrating geometry concepts in grades 1-8.

University of Maryland/Baltimore County Eminent Scholars Program \$300,000
ten-year grant for seed funds and an ongoing endowment for the Eminent Scholars Program for recruitment and retention of a new scholar in molecular and cellular biology.

University of Maryland/Baltimore County \$5,000
toward curriculum development and staffing costs of a one-week, pre-engineering, summer residency program for 20 minority females from the Baltimore region, in collaboration with the Baltimore City Public Schools, to introduce basic engineering concepts through exposure to college faculty and practicing engineers.

more and becomes an excellent student at McDonogh. Jo'nita Pearce lived in a housing project, and is now in Bryn Mawr and doing well. Damon Kinard grew up in the neighborhoods around Memorial Stadium and saw his dream realized: "I always wanted to move from street life to campus life, and Friends and BEST gave me that chance." Rahsan Lindsey becomes the second generation in his family to move from black city neighborhood to white private school.

There is a long and growing list of black students in Baltimore with similar socioeconomic backgrounds who are currently enrolled and, according to Greg Roberts who keeps track, doing well in the area's private schools. Thanks to these programs, these young people are

getting, on balance, the economic, social and academic opportunities taken for granted by middle and upper income students, considered so important to moving on in the world but routinely denied low income students. Barbara Vobejda, writing in the Washington Post recently on the stratification of America's colleges by class and race, commented on the importance of "class" in the business of life: "Able students who can afford to enter higher education's upper echelon will enjoy for much of their lives the economic and social benefits derived from that association."

That list of students now in the programs in Baltimore includes Tonyette Bethea, who lives on Pennsylvania Avenue and attends Roland Park; David

Cunningham and his sister Millah, who live on Garrison Boulevard and attend St. Paul's; Darrell Janey, who lives on West Garrison Avenue and attends Gilman; Stacey Spence, who lives on Eutaw Place and attends Park; Germaine Walker, who lives on Harford Road and attends McDonogh. It is these students who are succeeding in the programs who are the true measure of the their success.

The education community is searching for promising ideas. Programs that produce the Keefes, Linwoods, Jo'nitas, Damons and Rahsans of the world have to be included among those ideas. And surely deserving of the community's continuing interest and support -- and study.

"The Abell Report" focusing on the issues

"The Abell Report" is published bi-monthly, and is mailed to a diverse list of interested citizens. The reports contain timely articles that explore solutions to community problems; it is the Foundation's aspiration that they serve as a stimulus for others to debate the ideas in appropriate forums.

If you would like to be on our mailing list, please write or call the Foundation.

The following articles published by The Abell Foundation are available.

WRITE FOR YOUR FREE COPY

1. "Experiment at Walbrook Senior High: Is It A Part of 'The Answer' for Baltimore?"
2. "Marine Biotechnology in Maryland: Dreams Into Research Into Dollars Into Jobs. 'White There's Still Time.' "
3. " 'Success For All' at the Abbottston Elementary School: A Hopkins Program Designed to Insure that City 'At Risk' Children will be Reading at Grade Level by Fourth Grade is Showing Positive Results."
4. "Mentoring as a Technique of Enrichment in the Public Schools: What is It, What is It Costing, How Much of the Risk is It Taking out of 'At-Risk' Students? History, Reality and Hope."
5. "Computer Assisted Instruction: Potomac Edison Fosters Its Use by Donating Computers, Software to Public Schools in Western Maryland. General Assembly Considering Support of Statewide Effort."
6. "University-Affiliated Business Incubators to Nurture High-Tech Start-ups. The Idea is New -- and Promising. Should Maryland Make It a Priority to Create Jobs and to Help Promote Economic Development?"
7. "Maryland and Pension Fund Would Be Well Served By Investing Modest Percent Of Fund Into Venture Capital. Benefits: High Return, Reduction of Risk Through Diversification, Enrichment of Economic Development. Delegates Have Opportunity With 'Resolution No. 25.' "

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