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Minnesota Alliance with Youth

Great Stories: Promise Fellows at Work

Khulia Pringle – WISE Charter School

When Promise Fellow Khulia Pringle calls her experience "life changing," it's not just an empty cliché. The second-year AmeriCorps member says that since working with the students at WISE Charter School, she now wants to pursue a master's degree in education and become a teacher.

Pringle coordinates the academic enrichment program at the north Minneapolis charter school. In addition, she is responsible for the community partnership WISE has with NorthPoint Health and Wellness Center, which does all the health screenings for the children free of charge.

Pringle's belief in the African proverb "It takes a village to raise a child" fuels the work she does.

"I gained skills in coordinating and management through the fellowship, but it's been especially fulfilling helping the kids in the classroom, because I understand the necessity of caring adults. One of the most rewarding things is seeing when the kids grow to respect and admire you even when you discipline them."

Pringle struggled at the beginning because this was her first direct service position with youth. She says the kids gave her a hard time at first, but they came around.

"The challenge was learning everybody's name and everybody's issue so that I could work with them on an individual level," Pringle says.

"Becoming a Promise Fellow is a great way to get your feet wet in the field of education," Pringle says of her service experience. "It's also a great way to leave a positive mark on our future. Even if we don't see the effects of what we're doing now, we will see them later when the youth we serve become adults."

Promise Fellows' St. Paul Public Housing Site Recognized for Innovative Programming

The Promise Fellow site at St. Paul Public Housing has received a Merit Award for its unique work with youth living in public housing. This annual award from the National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials goes to innovative housing and development projects across the country.

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During the school year, Promise Fellows run after-school programs at each St. Paul Public Housing site, providing homework help, academic enrichment, sports, and other activities that youth in public housing may not have access to.

During the summer, in addition to providing service-learning opportunities to youth, the Promise Fellows host a half-day summer camp at each of the sites. The camps have a different theme each week, covering everything from cooking with an international flair to drama and career/college planning for the older students.

St. Paul Public Housing Promise Fellow site supervisor Connie Tovas says that what makes their work so unique is that the after-school groups and summer camps aren't connected to any one school. "At any given time there may be five different schools represented in one group," Tovas says.

Tovas says the relationships the youth build with the Promise Fellows serve as proof they are making a difference.

"The kids come back because they are getting something out of it. Not just because they have to be there."

Mor Chia Her and Elaine Lor – Prairie Seeds Academy

Promise Fellows Mor Chia Her and Elaine Lor led the older students of Prairie Seeds Academy in a two-phase Global Youth Service Day project to beautify their school inside and out. During Global Youth Service Day on April 26, the kids gave their janitor a paid vacation because he does so much for the school. While the janitor was away enjoying a well-deserved break, the kids took to cleaning the building from top to bottom: mopping the floors, cleaning the desks and organizing the books. After all the cleaning was done, the students painted inspirational quotes on the walls.

It was too cold in April to complete the second phase of the project then, so in May the students resumed their Global Youth Service Day work. With the help of the Twin Cities' Boy Scout Troop #100, the students planted flowers and plants across the school grounds.

Meanwhile, the elementary-aged students made quilted blankets for the residents at Theresa Living Center in St. Paul, a housing community for low-income women. Lor says that many of the students did not know how to sew before the project began, but by the end of the project they wanted to make more blankets for themselves. The project took three weeks and the students made 15 blankets.

For the students of Prairie Seeds, civic engagement started long before Global Youth Service Day. In honor of Valentine's Day, the students threw a party and baked cupcakes for the residents of Kashia Senior Center. They have also sorted clothes at Arc Village and packaged food for underprivileged areas in Africa with Feed My Starving Children.

Her says this was the first year Prairie Seeds Academy had a strong civic engagement push. "The students were very excited and involved with the project," she says of the experience. "The Student Council made most of the decisions on what projects were done, so for the most part the students felt they were in charge."