

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE



**Making a Difference:** Students and staff clean up a neighborhood in Kensington



**Welcome to the Family:** New students share their goals for the school year and beyond



**Stepping to Success:** Students gain college experience through residential program

## Congratulations, Class of 2009



In a commencement ceremony held at the Pennsylvania Convention Center, 102 YouthBuild Philadelphia students received high school diplomas on August 28, 2009. Over 1200 family members and friends of graduates joined YouthBuild Philadelphia staff and partners to celebrate the special occasion with the Class of 2009.

Philadelphia Mayor Michael A. Nutter delivered the inspirational keynote address. He recalled his memory of welcoming the graduates into YouthBuild just one year ago and encouraged the next class of YouthBuild students, also attending the ceremony, to learn from their example. Most of the graduates plan to continue their education at local colleges, while others are starting full-time careers.



# FALL 2009 NEWSLETTER



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### SAVE THE DATE!

WHO: YouthBuild students, staff, partners, friends, and YOU!

WHAT: Annual community service project

WHEN: Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service, January 18, 2010

# FALL 2009 NEWSLETTER

## Students 'Make a Difference' in Kensington with Community Revitalization Project

On October 23, 2009, in celebration of Make a Difference Day, Youthbuild Philadelphia and New Kensington Community Development Center (NKCDC) partnered to clean up a section of the New Kensington area in Northeast Philadelphia. The Youthbuild students focused on picking up trash, painting the overpass bridge at Lehigh and Frankford, and trimming and cleaning vacant lots on and around Frankford Avenue, from Lehigh to Alleghany.

Make a Difference Day is one of the largest community service events in the nation, bringing an estimated 3 million people out every year for a day of service. Youthbuild celebrates Make a Difference Day every year by offering all the resources of their student body and staff necessary to complete a day of service.



Staff mentors work as a team with their student mentees for the street clean-up.



Students <NAME NAME>, <NAME NAME>, and Andre Wright remove trash and weeds from an empty lot on Frankford Avenue in Kensington.

Over 250 Youthbuild students and staff picked up an estimated 2 tons (4000 lbs) of trash along the one mile stretch, revitalized several neglected lots in the area and painted over the rust and graffiti on the overpass bridge. The students showed great enthusiasm while working hard toward the goal of cleaning up the expansive area. NKCDC showed their appreciation by providing lunch for the Youthbuild students and staff.

Service is a core part of the Youthbuild experience. All students complete at least 675 service hour as part-time Americorps members. The students rebuild homes for low-income families, refurbish computers for community centers, and participate in various service projects. Our next all-school service day will be Martin Luther King Day on January 18, 2010.

## Volunteer Tutors and Mentors Lend a Hand to Students

YouthBuild volunteers are quickly becoming part of the family! Weekly tutors are matched with Academic Support classes to work one-on-one with students who need assistance with various class assignments. Students greet these volunteers as they arrive each week and thank them as they leave.

Volunteers are also supporting the teachers by assisting with photo copying and paper shredding in order to allow teachers more time for individual assistance and relationship building with students. On the weekends, volunteers join students for Saturday School to answer math questions and teach new computer skills.

### How you can get involved:

- Volunteer Tutors assist academic support classes and Saturday school sessions with homework and enrichment opportunities
- Career Mentors help students prepare for success through mock interviews and application assistance
- College Mentors guide college-bound students through the admissions process

Contact Volunteer Coordinator, Lauren Fitzgerald at lfitzgerald@YouthBuildPhilly.org

## A Clean Slate: New Students Join the YouthBuild Family

After two weeks of Mental Toughness Training, the final stage in our application process, 219 students were formally accepted into YouthBuild in a special ceremony at the Doubletree Hotel in Center City on September 3, 2009. YouthBuild Executive Director Simran Sidhu and Dean of Students Ameen Akbar welcomed this eager and excited group of students into the YouthBuild family as the Class of 2010.

Students celebrated their acceptance into the program through student led "YouthBuild" chants, many hugs, and some tears. Acknowledging the challenges that lay ahead, many students presented their YouthBuild Artifact - keepsakes such as a photo of a family member or personal artwork - that will help them stay motivated throughout the year. These emotional presenters shared inspirational stories about their children, friends, parents, and grandparents. They also spoke about past mistakes and their motivation to reclaim their education and change the paths on which they were headed.

Mental Toughness is over, but the real work has only started for these young people. The new students officially started classes on September 16, 2009 and will work toward high school diplomas, vocational certifications and 675 hours of community service (via AmeriCorps) throughout the next year.

## What are you preparing to accomplish after YouthBuild?



"I'm thinking hard about going to college. Williamson (Media, PA) is a good school for just men, and I think I would be able to focus better there. I can also play football at Williamson. I refuse to do nothing with my life after I've made it this far."

- Marshall Opher, 18



"A group of us are working with our construction instructor, Mr. Chris, on a business plan to start our own painting and interior design company. I want to be an interior designer, so I'm also planning to go to school to get my license."

- Maleeka Taylor, 19



"When I leave YouthBuild, I plan to go to Community College of Philadelphia for a degree in nursing so I can become a registered nurse."

- Victoria Garvin, 18



New students proudly display their YouthBuild Artifacts, here photos of family, and celebrate their induction following the acceptance ceremony.



# Student Spotlights

## Programs and Partnerships

## Stepping to Success at Thaddeus Stevens College

This summer, ten students gained the full college experience through *Stepping to Success*, a four week summer program at Thaddeus Stevens College of Technology. We partnered with the residential college in Lancaster, Pennsylvania to create the new program preparing students for full-time college.

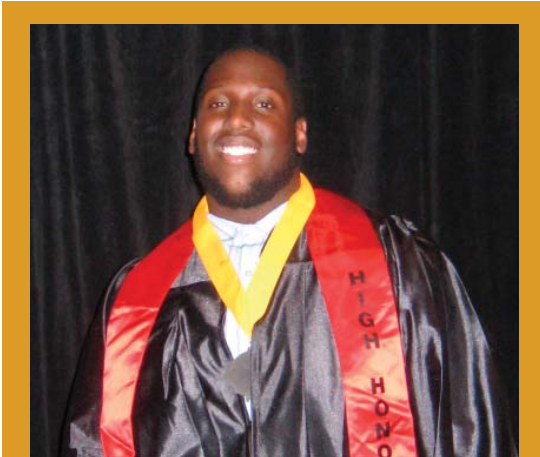
YouthBuild students were exposed to a variety of the college's vocational offerings, such as carpentry and masonry, as well as computer and life skills through two pre-college courses. Each student constructed a stepping stone in the masonry course to exemplify and commemorate the steps taken toward their future through the program. By living in dorms, eating in dining halls, and taking advantage of recreational facilities, the students experienced all that campus life has to offer.

The innovative partnership program with Thaddeus Stevens College of Technology exemplifies the ways in which we are continually expanding the opportunities available to students for post-secondary and career exploration. We are excited to develop a partnership with an organization that shares our mission of providing the highest quality education and opportunities to young people at varying levels of ability.

We look forward to expanding on this partnership with Thaddeus Stevens, as well as other local technical schools and colleges, to assist our students in learning what it means to succeed not only in post-secondary school but on their own.



YouthBuild students (above) learn angle cuts in carpentry class at Thaddeus Stevens and Rasheed Clark (below) shows off the frames he constructed following the lesson.



**Zurrell Toney, valedictorian of YouthBuild's class of 2009**, participated in *Stepping to Success* prior to enrolling full time at Thaddeus Stevens College of Technology to earn his Associate Degree in Business Administration.

At our 2009 commencement ceremony, Zurrell thanked his fellow graduates and YouthBuild staff for helping him to succeed:

"Let me make one thing clear - there are no better models to see everyday than the staff members and students of Youth Build Philadelphia Charter School. I have learned to face my future with respect, excellence and perseverance because of this special group of loving people, willing to always put themselves last and us first!"

Zurrell learned to put himself first in order to become a better student. He says he previously failed to graduate because of the constant distractions in his former school environment. The small classes and personal attention at YouthBuild created an atmosphere where he could stay focused and flourish.

He graduated with a 3.8 GPA from YouthBuild, and plans to replicate the same achievements at Thaddeus Stevens in his accounting, public speaking, and business skills courses. After he earns an associate degree, Zurrell intends to continue his educational path at Temple University with the ultimate goal of starting his own business.