The year 2020 has been a time of change for all. Living through a worldwide pandemic of COVID-19, losing loved ones and friends, government lockdown, environmental changes and disasters, black lives matter movement and fighting for human rights, worldwide protests and riots, and political distress. Collectively, we can all agree that it has been a world wind of emotions ranging from sadness, anger, frustration, joy, love, and all over again in a cycle. Due to these unprecedented issues that affected our schools, homes, and day-to-day lives, The Neighborhood Development Area – Educational Support Program transitioned from in-person to a remote learning program. This was not an easy transition and program participants adapted to the modification. Overall, we made it through and in a time like this, the youth needs us and we are happy to have continued services with the students of Validus Preparatory Academy High School.
The remote learning program was a unique experience for both staff and students alike. Staff and program participants met daily through the Zoom Application, which allowed for face-to-face video interaction. Through this application, program participants were able to take part in virtual events, workshops, virtual trips, attend daily program activities, and participate in an e-service learning experience.

BronxWorks, Inc. had a small team who led the remote learning program for the youth. The composition of the team included the following individuals: Shalima McCants, Assistant Department Director; Raymi De La Cruz, Program Director; Britney Caesar, Program Coordinator; Natalie Villanueva, Program Coordinator; Angelo Rodriguez, Youth Advocate. Britney Caesar led the NDA-ES program from September 2019 to May 2020 and left the position to pursue her Graduate Studies in California. Natalie Villanueva transitioned in May 2020 until June 2020 and continued the remote learning program alongside Angelo Rodriguez, in addition to beginning a new service learning experience with the program participants.

There are 25 participants enrolled in the NDA-ES program from an allotment of 26 slots. Although there were 22 active participants previously, as of May 11, 2020, there were 10 active participants for the remote learning program and service learning internship. While the attendance was low, plenty was accomplished; great services and quality subject content was provided. The 10 active program participants included the following individuals: Bethany Akerele, Geneva Amenume, Mellanie Benito, Sata Cham, Serenity Henlon, Fatima Ismail, Nnedi Nwadike, Deanne Reid, Yandeh Samura, and Melissa Vincente.

Academic Enrichment offered daily as part of program routine. Open tutoring sessions and one on one tutoring appointments was available for all participants. Some took advantage of this opportunity. In addition, academic resources and aide were given upon request. Weekly check-ins were conducted for each active participant to evaluate progress in challenging school subjects and to assess academic needs.
May 2020 – June 2020

Daily Program Activities

5: 06/01/2020, Jeopardy Game in Honor of Teen Self-Esteem Awareness Month.

4: 06/02/2020, Guest Speaker, Julien Terrel, teacher and social activist, spoke about current social movements and ways to support.


7: 06/15/2020, Collaborative work on service learning public product, blog "Leaders of Tomorrow."

6: 06/18/2020, Last Day of Program and Team Building

9: 06/17/2020, Team Building Jeopardy Game

8: 06/09/2020, Collaborative work on service learning project.
Students of Validus Preparatory Academy High School participated in a virtual service learning experience focused on Racial Injustice. The timing of this project was inevitable and pivotal for this current time in our history. The participants of the Neighborhood Development Area Educational Support Program, BronxWorks, Inc. staff, and our city funder, The Department of Youth and Community Development, made the success of this service learning experience and blog outcome possible.

Hard work went into this project, which ultimately served a greater purpose. During this service learning experience, simultaneously we were embarking on a historic journey of social justice, protests, and riots. The students serviced are young women and predominately West African, Muslim, and it was important to create an outlet for each to tell their own story and to represent the black culture and revolution. The purpose of this blog, Leaders of Tomorrow, is to instill black pride, knowledge, change, and justice.

CLICK OR COPY AND PASTE LINK TO WEB BROWSER TO VIEW ‘LEADERS OF TOMORROW’ BLOG, SERVICE LEARNING PUBLIC PRODUCT. VIEW LINK BELOW:

https://leadersoftomorrow2020.blogspot.com/
The service-learning project was a collaborative effort between staff and program participants. This was a 6-week long service learning experience, which entailed research, viewing supporting films and documentaries, guest speakers, virtual trips, individual tasks, and communal blog editing. To celebrate the accomplishment of the ‘Leaders of Tomorrow’ blog, program participants were invited for a small pizza party and reflection at the Carolyn McLaughlin Community Center on June 16, 2020. Safety precautions were in effect such as wearing facemasks, gloves, hand sanitation, and social distancing.

Angela Rodriguez, College Advisor, from the Center for Achieving Future Education (CAFE), met with program participants virtually every other Wednesday. Angela covered various topics and facilitated workshops, which included Entrepreneurship 101, open group discussion on current news and how we are coping with it individually, and virtual college tours.

Program participants were always engaged and enjoyed every workshop with Angela. Program participants took part in other CAFE events and internship opportunities as well such as College Acceptance Week and History Maker’s Information Sessions.
May 2020 – June 2020

13: 05/20/2020, Entrepreneurship 101 Workshop

12: 06/17/2020, Career Path Segment

15: 06/03/2020, Open Group Discussion

14: 06/17/2020, Post Card Group Activity

17: 06/17/2020, Virtual Tour to HSBCU College, Clark Atlanta University.

16: 06/17/2020, Virtual College Tour to SUNY Cortland.
18: 05/21/2020, program participants attended College Acceptance Week hosted by the Center for Achieving Future Education and The New York Urban League of Young Professionals. On this workshop, students engaged in a group discussion.

19: 06/18/2020, Program Participant joined Social Justice Activation Week for a group discussion.
Senior Salute

- Mellanie Benito: Mercy College
- Sata Cham: Fisk University
- Serenity Henlon: University of Rochester
- Nnedi Nwadike: College of Staten Island
- Deanne Reid: SUNY Orange
- Maceta Touray: New York Institute of Technology

Congratulations!

Class of 2020

A heartfelt gratitude to all who contributed to the success of the Neighborhood Development Area – Educational Support Program 2019—2020 at Validus Preparatory Academy High School. Thank you to our funder, the Department of Youth and Community Development. Especially to Carmen Velez, Contract Manager. Thank you to BronxWorks, Inc. and the Department of Children and Youth. Especially to my immediate supervisors, Shalima McCants, Assistant Department Director and Raymi De La Cruz, Program Director. Thank you to the staff of Validus Preparatory Academy High School. Especially to Principal Christopher Hibbert and Assistant Principal Eugene Figueroa. Thank you to my colleague, Angelo Rodriguez, Youth Advocate.

“In times of stress, the best thing we can do for each other is to listen with our ears and our hearts and to be assured that our questions are just as important as our answers.” – Mister Rogers