

# Groundwork for Success: Expanding Opportunity for College Access and Success (April 2017)

Good Shepherd Services' Groundwork for Success (GWS) is an innovative college preparation program that helps students access competitive colleges and universities and prepares them to succeed. Started in 2004, the program combines academic instruction and support, personal development and college preparation. In contrast to many college preparation programs that focus their interventions toward the end of high school, a key feature of the program's design is that GWS staff begin working with scholars in 9th grade, allowing for a long-term investment in each participant.

**“As long as you were in high school, GWS was somewhere you were welcome to start and grow, and even after you left, the doors remained open.”**

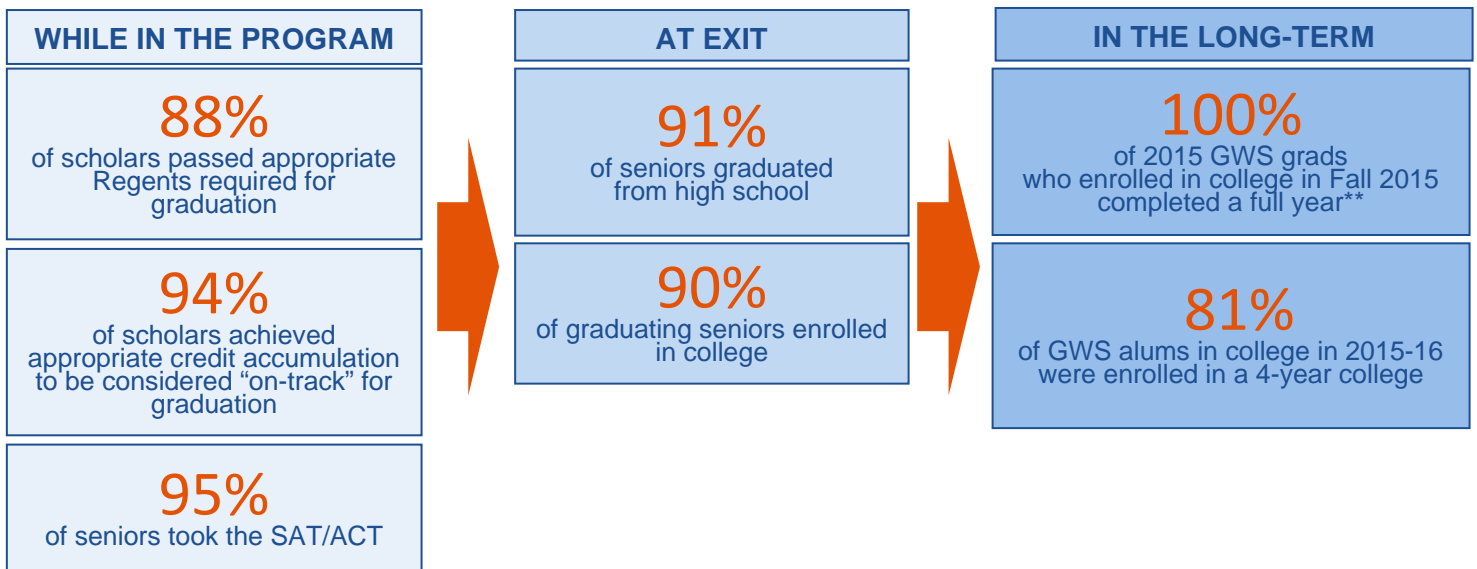
*-GWS alum*

### The Need

GWS currently serves scholars in 9th through 12th grade who live in East New York and surrounding neighborhoods of Central Brooklyn, an area with lower educational attainment and fewer opportunities leading to social mobility when compared to the city as a whole. In East New York, just 15.1% of the population has a bachelor's degree or higher, compared with 36% citywide. Further, 62% of families are headed by an individual who did not attend college.<sup>1</sup> Thus, students in neighborhood schools who have college ambitions have fewer resources to turn to when seeking college information and opportunities. In School District 19, which includes East New York, the four-year high school graduation rate is 61%.<sup>2</sup> Out of all students who complete high school, just 27% in the 2014-15 class indicated that they planned to attend a four-year college.


### Our 2015-2016 School Year Results


**82%** of 2014-15 GWS scholars were retained into 2015-16 and a total of **98** scholars enrolled in GWS:



### The Model

GWS implements Good Shepherd's overarching strength-based and evidence-informed Youth and Family Development approach. This approach builds on scholars' existing competencies while helping them to gain the developmental skills they need to succeed in and graduate from college. In addition to college exposure and fostering academic skills, the program provides scholars with the peer and adult support systems that have been associated in research with improved academic performance. More specifically, the core components of the model are:

 **Academic Instruction and Support.** GWS employs a combination of experiential class instruction and small group tutoring to address gaps in high school reading, writing, math and science instruction. The goal is to improve performance in school, while also addressing non-academic needs related to school success including study skills and academic confidence.


 **Personal Development.** The GWS model reflects Good Shepherd's emphasis on the importance of personal development and social support to achieving success. Research clearly supports that academic preparation alone is not sufficient to assuring that students leave high school ready to succeed in college. Additional social and emotional support strategies ensure that academic success is sustained by creating an environment that nurtures high expectations, persistence and confidence. GWS strategies include:

\*\*Data secured from the National Student Clearinghouse, which collects information on college enrollment, as well as student documentation.

- **Success Coach Model.** The program addresses personal and social development needs most directly through the success coach, who provides one-on-one counseling and acts as a guide to scholars in many aspects of their high school life. Research indicates that the presence of this kind of close, caring relationship is the single most important feature of successful college preparation programs.<sup>3</sup>
- **Peer Network.** GWS employs a Powerful Peers approach that is built around the principle that peer engagement and empowerment are core elements in successful youth programs.<sup>4</sup> Scholars are placed in class cohort “peer groups” for the duration of their time in the program. These peer groups foster community through opportunities for interaction in academic and nonacademic activities.
- **Parent Engagement.** Studies have long shown that parent involvement is a necessary component for academic success.<sup>4</sup> GWS engages parents both through one-on-one contacts and through group activities, such as community events. It is also a goal of the program to develop parents as informed allies in scholars’ college readiness.



*2014 GWS graduate, who enrolled at Cornell University, with a GWS Success Coach*

 **College Preparation.** The GWS college and career preparation component focuses both on access and readiness, as staff strive to expose scholars to the college environment, assist them with the application process, and ready them for the rigors and realities of college. GWS services, including SAT/ACT test preparation and college visits, function as academic leveling experiences, providing access to what is often otherwise only available to higher-income students. These experiences improve scholars’ chances of getting into more competitive colleges. This is an especially critical service in light of new research that shows that high-achieving, low-income students often do not apply to any selective college, despite the fact that those who do apply are admitted and graduate at high rates.<sup>5</sup> Also important is the application and financial aid assistance, which is useful for many first-generation students unfamiliar with the overall college process. Finally, GWS exposes students to the realities of college academics and life through peer discussions and one-on-one counseling.

## Going Forward

GWS has implemented a rigorous performance management process, working with Good Shepherd’s Program Evaluation and Planning Department to create a logic model and develop its Efforts to Outcomes (ETO) database to track a range of participant services and outcomes. A learning organization with a deep commitment to continuously strengthening its services, Good Shepherd engages staff at all levels - as well as participants - in conversations to drive data-informed decision-making. In 2015-16, GWS joined the Student Success Network (SSN), a group of education and youth development providers in NYC who are committed to learning about and affecting change in social and emotional development. The program administers a pre-post survey through SSN to measure changes in social-emotional learning competencies, such as growth mindset, that have been associated in research with long-term academic success and employability.<sup>6</sup>

### Feedback from GWS Alumni

In an August 2013 focus group, nine GWS alums provided feedback about aspects of the program that most benefitted them. Among the components they noted as most effective:

- **The Success Coach Model.** Scholars emphasized that their success coach became involved in multiple aspects of their lives, assisting with academics, reaching out to their schools, establishing relationship with parents, offering college advice and acting as a sounding board for life issues.
- **The Peer Network.** Peer support, according to the alums, provided an outlet for discussing personal issues and challenges that can often impede progress toward goals.
- **College Prep and Exposure.** The alums validated the effectiveness of GWS efforts to offer academic leveling experiences, such as college trips and SAT prep. One alum who attended college in Georgia, said he would not have applied to an out-of-state university had it not been for the college visits to schools outside of New York. Another student said the program’s college test prep introduced her to exams she didn’t know existed, such as the ACT and SAT II’s. While many of the alums in the focus group had college ambitions before GWS, the program opened to them a wider realm of college options: “They taught us things that heightened our chances of getting into better colleges.”

#### Citations:

- 1 U.S. Census Bureau, 2014 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates. Table C17018.
- 2 New York State Report Card 2014-2015 database, High School Post-graduation Plans of Completers.
- 3 National Postsecondary Education Cooperative (2001). Paving the Way to Postsecondary Education. Washington DC: NCES.
- 4 Oesterreich, H. (2000). Characteristics of Effective Urban College Preparation Programs. ERIC Digest No. 159. New York.
- 5 Hoxby, C. (2012). The Missing “One-Offs”: The Hidden Supply of High-Achieving, Low Income Students. NBER Working Paper No. 18586.
- 6 Pellegrino and Hilton (2012). *Education for Work and Life: Developing Transferable Knowledge and Skills in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. National Academy of Sciences.

*Good Shepherd Services is a leading multi-service organization in New York City that operates over 80 programs in neighborhoods where children, youth and families face the greatest challenges to provide the support they need to succeed. To learn more about Good Shepherd Services, please visit [www.goodshepherds.org](http://www.goodshepherds.org). This report was written by the Program Evaluation and Planning Department at Good Shepherd Services. Groundwork for Success is currently funded through public and private grants. We gratefully acknowledge the support of the Hearst Foundations, Stella and Charles Guttman Foundation, Dunn Development Corp., New York Community Trust and New York State Higher Education Services Corporation.*