



RISING TO THEIR POTENTIAL

Summer 2018 Newsletter



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We see what can be.



A Wise Choice

He didn't like the sport —at first. But when six-foot-five, 240-pound David Nwaogwugwu began to learn the plays and bond with teammates during his freshman year in high school, he became football's number one fan and Dewitt Clinton High School's star player. Now, David is on his way to Temple University on a full scholarship to play Division 1 football as defensive end on the Temple Owls team.

"This is just a blessing," David said. "My mom and dad have been talking about this day since I got the offer from Temple. This is the happiest I've ever seen my dad. It just makes me so happy to see my parents proud of me. That's all you ever want," he added with an illuminating grin.

But the road to Division 1 football wasn't easy. After moving to the USA from Nigeria about eight years ago, a young David was bullied by classmates for the very differences that make up the rich tapestry of our country. Thankfully, those issues with his peers vanquished with maturity over time. However, in his sophomore year of high school, David's low grades nearly jeopardized his future in football. With a 68 average and a self-proclaimed rebellious attitude, David knew he had to get serious about his education. That's when he joined our Student Success Center (SSC) and met program coordinator Cynthia Pérez, who he credits with getting him back on the right track.

"You just have to surround yourself with good people and good things will happen," he said. "Before SSC, I was

immature. I used to play around too much. Then I met Miss Cynthia and I'm a little more mature now. I have a plan for my life," David continued. "The center is a place where students can talk to Miss Cynthia, fill out college applications and do school work. This is like *our* place."

SSC has become a second home for many juniors and seniors where they begin to blossom and realize that the future they envision for themselves is within their grasp.

As David prepares to enter an unfamiliar world of higher education and high-pressure college sports, he's excited to fulfill his dream of becoming a nurse while leaving all options open for a career in professional football. David also plans to visit his SSC family and pay-it-forward to help other students succeed.

He's Gotta Have It

Imagine going on your first acting audition ever —and landing the role. That's exactly what happened to 18-year-old Emmanuel Adigun, a senior in our Men in Progress (MIP) program at Boys and Girls High School in Brooklyn.

"Let me tell you about my theater teacher, Mr. Robinson. Since the day I met him in my sophomore year, he said he saw a lot of potential in me — a lot of talent. Back then, I didn't know what he was talking about because I felt like I was a regular kid," Emmanuel said.

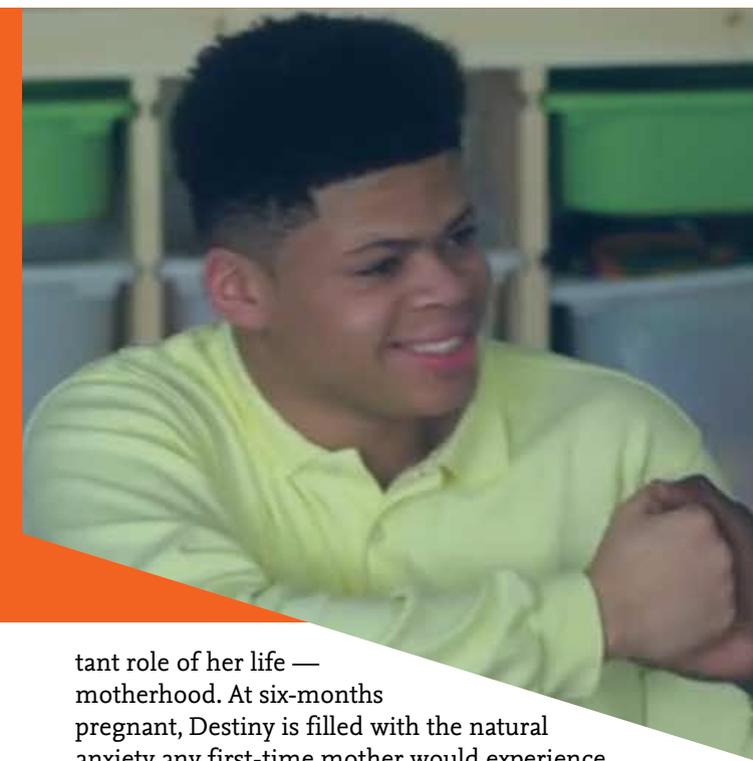
It wasn't until Mr. Robinson invited several students, including Emmanuel, to audition for a role in a new Netflix show called *She's Gotta Have It* created by his friend, acclaimed director Spike Lee.

"In my head, I was thinking I'm getting it. There was no doubt in my mind. It took me one or two takes then they sent it to Spike," he said. And he was correct! He landed the role with his classmate and they shared a scene where they played the classic game of wit called the dozens. Although acting is Emmanuel's top goal right now, our program is helping him realize that the world is his proverbial oyster.

Emmanuel joined our program in his junior year with a bit of trepidation, but he quickly became its champion after meeting our staff and learning about activities.

"This program has saved some kids' lives. If you didn't come to program you wouldn't get homework done. Places you don't get to see like Philly and Washington DC, MIP offers trips there. They take you around and let you learn history. It's a fun experience and I love every staff here," he said.

Indeed, Emmanuel has completed college applications but he has his heart set on moving to Los Angeles for acting lessons and to pursue more roles. He will miss the MIP program, which he said, "means we're progressing to be great in the future. The future to me is really bright because as long as you have potential and you see yourself in higher places then you're going to make it regardless of whoever thinks otherwise." With his natural talent, positive mindset, and confidence, Emmanuel is poised to make great strides in his future.



A Step Forward

Entering the workforce is an exciting rite of passage, but it can also be a challenge for youth with little experience in an office environment. In order to help our participants get their feet wet while layering in the additional supports that are critical to their success at work, we are offering internships to address their experience gap.

In March, our 7th Avenue office in Manhattan welcomed a cohort of interns as a part of the Mentored Internship Program, a Pinkerton funded initiative that provides a supportive work experience for youth in foster care. Interns were matched with staff who served as mentor-supervisors in the areas of Government and Community Relations, Strategy Evaluation and Planning, Human

Resources, The Executive Office, Information Technology, Facilities, Grants and Contracts, External Relations, and Health Services.

For 22 year-old college student Destiny Thompkins, interning with The Executive Office in an administrative role helped solidify her dreams of managing operations for a nonprofit or corporation. "I was hoping to better my clerical skills, my communications skills, and networking skills," Destiny said before crediting her mentor-supervisor, Raven Mitchell, with helping her hone those skills as well as learn the importance of advocating for yourself.

As Destiny works toward an Associates Degree in Business Administration, she is also preparing for the most impor-

tant role of her life — motherhood. At six-months pregnant, Destiny is filled with the natural anxiety any first-time mother would experience. However, she's ready. "The changes and the growth that will come from motherhood is a blessing because sometimes you need something to push you forward and help you grow," she said.

For Destiny and her cohort colleagues, the hands-on experience will serve as a strong foundation for future employment. With an encouraging retention rate of 90%, a higher than expected rate for a program of this kind, we were approved to carry on this initiative for an additional 12 months.

