

LifeLink is Good Shepherd Services' college access and success program. Operating in Brooklyn and the Bronx, the program serves low income students ages 17-24 with histories of academic challenges and disengagement. LifeLink implements Good Shepherd's overarching strength-based and evidence-informed Youth and Family Development approach. This approach builds on participants' existing competencies while helping young people gain the developmental skills they need to succeed in, and graduate from college. In addition to fostering academic skills among young people, the program provides students with the peer and adult support systems that have been associated in research with improved academic performance. The program is designed in three phases that promote engagement and achievement of key milestones from pre-enrollment through college graduation.

## Fiscal Year 2019 Results

**654** Participants enrolled **93%** of Fall 2016 and Spring 2017 cohorts completed their first semester in college **67%** of Fall 2017 cohorts complete their 1<sup>st</sup> year in college

## Program Components



### Recruit and Prepare

Recruit and prepare potential high school graduates, many from GSS's YABC, partnership school and in-school support programs.



### Mobilize

Mobilize students to be ready for college through an Access program. The program provides participants with an intensive curriculum that equips them with the skills they need to pass the City University of New York (CUNY) entrance exams. Students build college readiness through intensive skill-building in math, reading and writing so as to reduce or eliminate the need for remedial classes once enrolled at CUNY.



### Support

Support young people in CUNY along their path to graduation. With a strong partnership in place between Good Shepherd staff and CUNY, LifeLink offers both on-campus and off-campus services including workshops and tutoring sessions, college and career advisement, counseling, employment assistance, financial aid assistance, social networking and referrals within the college and within Good Shepherd.

## Our Research-Informed Strategies

Elements of the LifeLink program are delivered using six research-informed strategies:



### Student-Driven Leadership

Participants are coached through the program largely by student leaders, who have similar backgrounds and serve as "credible messengers." Older students help orient younger students to the student-driven culture of the program and motivate them to become active learners, emphasizing personal responsibility, self-motivation, community and participation.



### Academic Bolstering Opportunities

The program prepares students for the academic rigors of college through a blend of teacher- or peer-led instruction, one-on-one tutoring and online learning. Each student works with staff to develop an individualized program of study designed around his or her own abilities, needs and desired results.



### Peer Support System

The program connects students with strong systems of peer support. Older students and recent program graduates act as mentors for newer students. Peer mentoring in a post-secondary setting is supported in research as having long-term impacts on retention and graduation rates, via increases in academic self-efficacy, program satisfaction and perseverance in student educational goals.<sup>1</sup>



### Strategically Disbursed Incentives

LifeLink uses modest financial stipends to incentivize students' efforts in the program. This practice is supported by a study which found that offering modest financial incentives to students who achieved tangible tasks led to significant improvement in test scores in the longer term.<sup>4</sup>



### Personal Supports

Through individual and group counseling, the program develops among its participants the social and emotional competencies associated in research with academic success and employability in the present and future.<sup>2</sup> In accordance with the evidence-informed primary person approach, students work with a primary staff member who helps them to overcome barriers, have high expectations, understand requirements and set goals.<sup>3</sup>



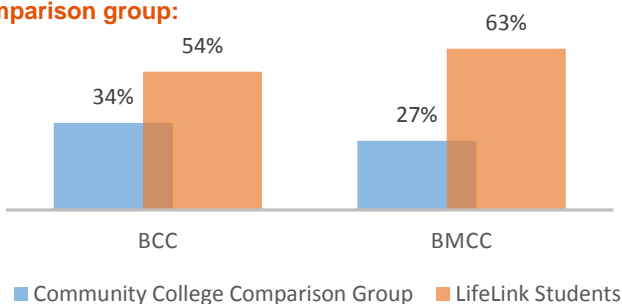
### Inviting & Professional Physical Space

LifeLink centers are welcoming environments that offer a comfortable atmosphere for students to work, meet, actively learn and celebrate successes together.

## LifeLink participants consistently outperform matched comparison group:

Data provided by the CUNY Office of Institutional Research indicate that BCC and BMCC LifeLink students earn credits at higher rates than comparison groups at their respective community colleges. This data shows the percent of full-time freshmen enrolled in an associate program for the first time who earned 20 credits or more in the fall and spring semesters, an indicator of being on track to graduate.\*

\* Full-time undergraduates take 12 or more credits per semester.



**“At times, I found myself lost and wondering where I was going. But after meeting up with my counselor, I found where I was going and what more I need to do. It made me feel like I could see my future.”**

-Participant, Brooklyn LifeLink

### Student Highlight

One of Brooklyn Lifelink's participants was awarded the Kaplan Scholarship. This makes him one out of two students selected from Kingsborough Community College this year. With Jose's determination, LifeLink's curriculum and personalized assistance, he improved his math and reading scores to place out of remedial courses in college\*\*. He will soon be joining a cohort of other Kaplan scholars as he prepares to transfer to a four year school, and complete his Bachelor's degree in Computer Engineering.

Jose is from Mexico and moved to the U.S. at the age of 14 to pursue a better education. He lives with extended family members while his immediate family remains back home. Jose excelled tremendously as an honors student at KCC, and will graduate this fall with his Associate's degree. He plans to transfer to a four year college in fall of 2020.

\*\*Access Assessment: Jose improved score by 27%

## Next Steps

**Evaluation:** Good Shepherd is a learning organization with a deep commitment to continuously strengthening services. We engage staff at all levels - as well as participants - in conversations to learn from internal data and, in consultation with empirical evidence, to inform program improvement. This year, LifeLink was one of six CBOs selected to participate in the first year of the #DegreesNYC Data Co-op and Learning Network. The goal of the Data Co-op is to link community-based data with institutional data (NYC DOE and CUNY) at the student level. The team meets monthly to share best practices and identify key indicators that assist students to be on track to succeed in post-secondary education and career attainment, in the hopes of using those measures to improve practice and drive advocacy on behalf of students.

**Advocacy and Program Expansion:** LifeLink has been extending its reach as a founding member of the Bronx Opportunity Network (BON), a collaborative effort of seven Bronx community-based organizations designed to increase the community college access and success of academically at-risk young adults in the Bronx. We have also established the Brooklyn Opportunity Network (BKON) to accomplish this work in Brooklyn. LifeLink began collaborating with colleges in the areas of college testing and peer support to better prepare students. Over the last few years the partnership has evolved as the BON and BKON support the colleges in their efforts to improve structures, policies, and procedures that lead to more effective services to marginalized students. This includes looking for better ways to recruit low-income students with a history of academic challenges while also developing efficient services and administrative structures to support their college success.

Good Shepherd is deeply committed to increasing support for students who are academically at risk. Over the past year there has been a significant expansion and acceleration in the pace of program involvement, student achievement, and service integration at both Bronx Community College and Hostos for LifeLink students. We have close connections at LaGuardia Community College and Borough of Manhattan Community College, and at Kingsborough Community College.

LifeLink staff continue to participate in the CUNY K16 Network for College Success, working with CUNY and CBO partners to advance the field of college success and advocate for the needs of low-income and first generation college students. Upcoming changes in CUNY remedial policy indicate that CUNY will be eliminating placement exams for students entering college in spring 2020. We are leveraging our work in BON and BKON to continue to build relationships with CUNY and engage in ongoing conversations to help shape how the new remedial policy will be implemented at the college level and to adapt our model to best meet student needs under changing circumstances.

### Footnotes:

- 1 Budge, S. Peer Mentoring in Post-Secondary Education: Implications for Research and Practice. Journal of College Reading and Learning, 37(1), Fall 2006.
- 2 Farrington et al. (2012). Teaching Adolescents to Become Learners: The Role of Noncognitive Factors in Shaping School Performance: A Critical Literature Review.
- 3 U.S. Department of Education, What Works Clearinghouse Intervention Report – ALAS, October 2006.
- 4 Fryer, Roland. Financial Incentives and Student Achievement: Evidence from Randomized Trials, Harvard University, April 2010.
5. Office of Institutional Research and Assessment, Performance Management Process, May 31, 2019