



FAYETTEVILLE-MANLIUS A BETTER CHANCE

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DESPITE THE PANDEMIC, FM-ABC GOING STRONG

Despite the worldwide challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Fayetteville-Manlius A Better Chance (FM-ABC) program continues to support young women from educationally underserved areas in obtaining a college-preparatory education at Fayetteville-Manlius High School. "Given the nature of our program, the scholars we attract are resilient," says FM-ABC board chair Nancy Durkin. "They are working hard and making the best of a less than ideal situation."

For the 2020-21 academic year, FM-ABC is home to four scholars: senior Ijeoma Okoh, juniors Latisha Lubega and Jeanette Ward and freshman Serai Williams. The older three were scholars last year, sent home unexpectedly in March, when Governor Andrew Cuomo closed schools across the state. At first, it was hoped the hiatus would only last a few weeks. But as we all know, in-person learning never resumed. The scholars finished their school year online and graduating senior Briana Amador had to return over the summer to retrieve her belongings.



Our Scholars: Serai, Latisha, Jeannette and Ijeoma

In response to the pandemic, the FM-ABC board created a COVID committee tasked with developing policies and procedures to respond to COVID-19.

The scholars are expected to follow COVID social distancing guidelines and to complete a daily log, entering their temperature and any symptoms. "I would like to commend our resident director, LaRae Martin-Coore, and Yesenia Rodriguez, resident advisor and cook, for stepping up everyday to lead the ABC house, keep the girls on track, stimulated, well-fed, and feeling cared for and safe," says Bonnie Grossman, personnel chair.

For the 2020-21 academic year, the FM school district has adopted a hybrid learning platform. "Scholars are only on campus two days a week. The rest of the week they are learning remotely from the ABC House," says academic chair Anne Scuderi. "This is a big adjustment, as students need to be self-reliant on remote days and concentrate their social and academic interactions on in-person days."

Kristen Rubacka, who serves as the scholar's guidance counselor at FMHS, says she is spending more time supporting students with assignment management as well as connecting students with their teachers for help. "This has always been part of my role but I'm finding that, due to the added layer of remote communication, sometimes students can feel overwhelmed and unsure how to proceed," she says.

In addition to spending less time physically at school and extracurricular activities, one of the biggest changes in scholar's lives has been restrictions on time spent with host families. "As a precaution to lessen exposure and keep everyone healthy, we are currently not allowing the scholars to visit with their host families at the families' homes," says Susan Muench, host family coordinator. While that has been a big disappointment for everyone, LaRae and Yesenia have been instrumental in helping to coordinate outside activities that give the families the opportunity to meet up with the scholars in a safe manner."

Host families have taken turns bringing lunch to the scholars at the house on Sundays. There is also a dedicated time on Sunday afternoons for the scholars and host families to do Zoom calls to keep a regular connection and sense of routine. "Rather than cancel all special activities, everyone is working together to come up with creative ways to gather safely and stay connected," says Muench.

Despite the obstacles, everyone involved with the FM-ABC program remains committed to its success. "Our staff, parents, board members, host families, academic advisors, and scholars have gone above and beyond to make the most out of this very out-of-the-ordinary year," says Kathy Elbadawi, Fundraising chair. "It is a challenge, but our team is up for it!"



ALUMNAE NEWS

F-M A Better Chance Board of Directors 2020 - 2021 Academic Year

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Annette Miles '85 is officially an empty nester. Her daughter began her junior year at Boston University in the College of Fine Arts/School of Theatre, majoring in technical direction and stage management. Her son began his freshman year at the University of Chicago (her alma mater), majoring in political science. Annette celebrated 15 years with the Southeast Permanente Medical Group/ Kaiser Permanente in Georgia as a Maternal-Fetal Medicine Specialist.



Beth (Ingrid) Hanson-Thompson '94 started a new job with advertising agency MRM/McCann as an associate creative director and is working from home. Husband Earl is back to his normal commuting routine, which he doesn't mind because Manhattan is still virtually empty. EJ, now two years old, is busy learning about dinosaurs and trying to become a DJ. "He's talking up a storm and keeps his grandmother busy. We are fortunate that my mom is able to take care of him during the weekdays while we're working" says Beth. "I'm sending you all lots of love and positive vibrations and looking forward to a time when we can all get together again."



Maribelle Hernandez '02 is currently stationed at the 1st Special Operations Wing at Hurlburt Field, Florida, working as the director of Continuous Process Improvement. "Working in an U.S. Air Force innovation cell has been exciting as we research emerging technologies and test within our special operation mission sets," she says. "I finally commissioned last year and couldn't have done it without my beautiful



family." Isaiah is now in his senior year, Marquise and Hope are juniors, and Cassidy is in 4th grade, all doing online homeschool due to COVID. "The kids love it and it has brought us closer together as a family unit. Next year, Chris will finally be joining us in Florida after a three-year tour in Alabama. He's slated to teach ROTC at the University of Southern Alabama."



Shynise Stiff '10 continues her work leading diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives in education. "I've gotten the chance to expand my work beyond New York City and collaborate with school districts more nationally, so work has been exciting," she writes. "Personally, things are going well. I found some ways to enjoy the summer and get out into the sun."

Tanaja Stephenson '16 graduated from the University of Virginia in May with degrees in African & African American Studies and Women, Gender & Sexualities. "I did not get to walk down the lawn to the rotunda to claim my degrees, but my family, friends and school community made sure I still felt special," she writes. "I received awards and recognitions from various secret societies of UVA detailing my efforts throughout my undergraduate career. It was a humbling experience to see others recognize my work before I could." Tanaja is now teaching Pre-K at a girls school in Washington, DC, and is also working toward her master's in education at Johns Hopkins University. Both work and school are virtual, but she's acclimated well. She sends a shout out to Papa Whyland, "who has been my dad even four years after leaving FM. The Whylands and The Hawks will always have my heart. They helped to make FM feel more like home."



Briana Amador '20 is a first-year student at Tufts University



2020

MEET OUR SCHOLARS

Name: Ijeoma Okoh
Hometown: Cambria Heights, Queens, NY
Class Year: Senior
Favorite class this year in school: SUPA Public Affairs because we speak about current events and issues that we face in the U.S. currently.



Last book read: *So You Want To Talk About Race*
My professional aspiration is to: I aspire to become a pediatric anesthesiologist managing my own practice in an inner-city setting.
What I like best about the ABC program: The amazing support system: Mrs. C, Yecenia, all of the board members, host families, teachers, and friends.

What has most surprised me about the ABC program: I didn't realize how much I would learn from being here.
Something I never did before I was in the ABC program is: Snow-tubing. Since coming to FM, winter has become my favorite season.
Biggest challenge posed by COVID: Finding activities to do at home due to sports/clubs being canceled. It felt really weird to not be so busy.

"Silver Lining" I have discovered because of COVID: An increase in productivity and focus on my college applications and schoolwork.
A fun fact to know about me is: I love avocados.



Name: Latisha Lubega
Hometown: Secaucus, NJ
Class Year: Junior
Favorite Class in School this Year: Pre Calculus
Last Book Read: *The Catcher in the Rye*
My professional aspiration is to: Start my own successful music label and multiple nonprofit organizations.

What I like best about the ABC program: The family bond in the house and the amount of people who care about us.
What surprised me most about the ABC Program: The amount of support we receive in all of our endeavors during our time in the house.
Something I never did before I was in the ABC program: Hiking
Biggest Challenge Posed by COVID: Adjusting to virtual learning and not seeing my friends as frequently.

"Silver Lining" I have discovered due to COVID: I get to spend a lot of time with the girls in the house.
A fun fact to know about me is: My favorite thing to eat is French fries with lots of ketchup.

Name: Jeanette Ward
Hometown: Brooklyn, NY
Class Year: Junior
Favorite class this year: U.S. history
Last book read: *Catcher in the Rye*
My professional aspiration is to: Become a forensic psychologist.
What I like best about the ABC program: Meeting new people from many different backgrounds and having the opportunity to try new things. I also love my host families.



What has most surprised me about the ABC program: People in upstate New York like to hike.
Something I never did before I was in the ABC program is: Play tennis.

Biggest challenge posed by COVID: Keeping up with many different due dates for assignments and not getting to see family.
"Silver Lining" I have discovered because of COVID: I have come to appreciate the people around me a lot more.
A fun fact to know about me is: I'm weirdly good at guessing the amount of things.



Name: Serai Williams
Hometown: Brooklyn, NY
Class Year: Freshman
Favorite Class: English
Last book read: *The Odyssey*
My professional aspiration is to: Be a doctor who helps children who are less fortunate
What I like best about

the ABC Program: The sense of family and support that everyone around me gives.
What has most surprised me about the ABC program: How welcoming everybody was.
Biggest challenge posed by COVID: Interaction with other people.
A fun fact to know about me is: I programmed my own website.



2020



2020

ABC HOUSE GAINS NEW OUTDOOR SPACE

The COVID-19 pandemic has limited extracurricular activities at the high school and outside social interactions. As a result, ABC scholars are spending more time than ever at the house. When board members discussed "wish list" projects to apply for grant funds, one idea was the creation of a patio to provide the girls with outdoor living space.

This fall, that patio will become a reality, thanks to the generosity of local firm Landscapes East. When contacted for an estimate, James Burt, president of Landscapes East, graciously offered to donate the new patio, noting that the company had been fortunate to continue to work during the pandemic and wanted to give something back to the community.

Landscapes East will complete the project in conjunction with Onondaga Earth Corps, a not-for-profit organization with a mission "to empower youth to be active participants in creating positive change for their communities and their environment."

The patio will be tucked into the northeast corner of the house and will utilize plantings and hardscape features to provide a private, safe, and healthy outdoor space for the scholars and staff to enjoy. "We are very grateful to James and Landscape East for this generous and unexpected donation," says Kim Peden, House Committee chair.





FM-ABC DONORS 2019-2020

Dear Friends, Neighbors, and Supporters,

The year 2020 has been one of disruption, division, and confusion. Under these extreme and trying times, our F-M A Better Chance Program has survived. We continue to provide our academically talented and exceptionally motivated young women of color a quality secondary education in a safe and healthy environment. These strong scholars defy the odds and times to continue on the avenue to be all that they can be. They will attend high-ranking colleges and pursue careers to become successful leaders in society, because of the four-year foundation they have received here.

Our purpose is to support these scholars and to help make their higher education dreams reality. It takes many volunteers, a dedicated staff, and sufficient funds to make this happen. Because we are 100-percent donor funded, financial support is a cornerstone of our program. This year especially, the financial cost of our program has risen, while income has fallen.

We ask for your support proudly, because we have seen how the F-M A Better Chance Program dramatically alters our scholars' futures and the FM community. Our scholars' success stories make us all the more committed to our mission.

With your support, F-M ABC scholars will unquestionably continue to have A BETTER CHANCE.

Thank you.

Sincerely,
Nancy Durkin
Chair, Board of Directors
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