

## Alumni share experiences and ideas

Sheila Wright, a 2004 graduate of A Better Chance of Andover, said the program opened her eyes to a world of possibilities. "ABC allowed me to see life from a different perspective," said Wright, now a pediatric-cardiac nurse. "I started to ask what would it take to get what I want? Education was the answer." After graduating from Andover High School, she attended Ohio State University on a full scholarship. Later she went to nursing school, and recently landed a dream job at a leading hospital in Columbus, Ohio.

Bill Rolon '85 rose above the streets of New York's South Bronx to become a teacher and middle school principal in his home state. "ABC truly shaped who I have become," Rolon said. "Andover provided me with a safe place to grow and learn and appreciate finishing school," he explained. In fact, he recently finished his doctorate in education. His ABC housemates "were pleasantly surprised that I went so far with education," he reported.

Rolon and Wright are among 140 graduates of ABC of Andover thriving in their careers and communities. Now, they're eager to help a new generation of scholars. At the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary reunion last October, many other alumni shared stories of how ABC transformed their life. In a special session, they also brainstormed ways to make the program even stronger.

Moderated by ABC of Andover board member Anny Candelaria Escobar, '97, Tabor Academy, the alumni session focused on key questions. What was good about your ABC experience? What resources were most useful? Access to a top-notch education was clearly life changing, alumni said. Alumni were also asked, What do you wish you had been more informed about when you graduated?



Sheila Wright, 2nd from right, and other ABC alumni are considering ways to mentor the program's current scholars. She is shown with (from left), Tyina Cuevas '01, Alexis Singh '09, and Brianna Glenn '06.

Financial literacy and stress management rose to the top of the list. How can ABC best equip scholars with post-graduation skills and resources? More career counseling and mentorships, they advised.

In a separate forum, current scholars identified what they want most from alumni. "Real conversations regarding college life" as well as career connections made their list. Most of all, scholars want alumni mentors. In fact, an informal buddy system started on the last day of the 50<sup>th</sup> reunion. Care packages and conversations have followed.

....continued on page 5



### President's view: Alumni impact their communities, families, and professions

If you wonder why ABC puts so much effort into bringing scholars here to live and study at Andover High School, just listen to what its graduates have accomplished and how their studies, development, and family experiences have influenced their lives.

For many of our alumni, the ABC experience significantly shaped their life experience and influenced the way each went on to impact their family, community, and occupation. During their high school years, the scholars chose academic courses and extracurricular enrichment activities that eventually introduced them to their future professions. Every year our scholars are encouraged to try new experiences in and out of school to explore a variety of interests. Our alumni's course of study in college and graduate school provided the skills to innovate in their professions, often in ways that serve and empower under-represented or underserved communities.

Alumni have been drawn to professions where their education and experience can lift families out of cycles of poverty and marginalization. They share that they sought roles that could change the trajectory of people's lives in the ways they had experienced. Additionally, alumni have pursued higher education and professional roles in medicine, public health, social work, education, information technology, ministry, law and advocacy, community development, government, business, and many others.

In conversing with alumni, they also shared that their ABC involvement helped them culturally and developmentally - from the scholarly disciplines honed during weeknight study hours, the camaraderie and companionship of scholar and staff housemates, the family support of host parents, and the life management skills built while living away at boarding school. Such nurturing later influenced their advisory approach in their jobs....Continued on page 2

Alumni have considered how to bring a higher level of support to those they work with or serve. For example, many of them pursued work in the education field and are using their leadership roles to establish or lead schools where they guide the programming and educational models for scholars, from the elementary levels through undergraduate and graduate programs.

One alumnus expanded his teaching role at his university to establish a program that provides ABC-like college preparatory support to undergraduates and ensures their successful navigation toward college graduation. Several others in leadership roles in teaching and administration are creating different models for building the skills for students to be effective and successful entering the workforce. Additionally, alumni in the medical and social work fields work daily to provide their patients with care and advisory services that lead to healthier lives. Still another alumnus established a program to interact with the patients he cared for in his hospital emergency room to address the underlying reasons why violence played a role in their lives.

The ABC host family experience strengthened scholars' family values, too. The ABC host family structure provided a safe and nurturing environment for one alumna to understand how families could relate, communicate, and encourage one another in ways

that she may not have experienced growing up. Today, she draws from that model in her relationship choices and has learned different ways to interact with her family members.

Others have taken that family life modeling to their social work or even into education. One alumna works for a company that empowers families with a learning framework built on enhancing child/parent collaboration. The learning model strengthens the family bond while educating both the child and parent and sharing leadership of the process.

Alumni have extended their family values and structure to their communities through ministry, volunteer work, and community development. They create safe spaces for children, young adults, and families to establish strong family foundations and community connections to grow and encourage one another.

Donors, volunteers, and alumni provide the financial, time, and access contributions that allow the ABC scholars to focus on building skills and empowerment to go forward and make a significant impact on our world. We each consider what we can bring to the scholars and the program that will support their aspirations. Thank you for playing a role in their journey.



## Seniors discuss diversity with School Committee

ABC of Andover scholars commanded the stage in several recent venues. Seniors Elise Cabrera and Jenni Nguyen were invited in February to address the Andover School Committee. As leaders of the Diversity Club at Andover High School, these senior scholars spoke to the school administrators about the social tensions they and other teens routinely face.

"It was good to be heard," Jenni shared. The Diversity Club, with about 12 members, has proven a powerful outlet for speaking out on social equality since it was started several years ago by a group of concerned AHS students, including Elise and Jenni. "We were so angry about the social injustice going on in our country that we said OK, we're going to do this," recalled Jenni.

The Diversity Club made the news in a February 15 Andover Townsman article, "Andover students tackle big topics with respect." Elise is quoted on the goals of the club: "Our central mission is to spread awareness of social issues not only in our community, but on a global scale." The Diversity Club holds workshops that aim to break down stereotypes and meets with AHS clubs that are more socially conservative. "It's good to air our differences," Jenni noted.

Elise is also actively engaged in the AHS Show Choir group, From Start to Finish, which combines singing, dancing, and theatre. ABC junior Olamide Olayinka is also a member. Every year, the award-winning co-ed group gives about 30 performances including six major concerts. During February recess, the 150-member Show Choir traveled to Tennessee for the "Heart of America Nashville," a national competition; From Start to Finish won fourth place in the championship division.

Elise and Jenni stayed busy with extracurricular activities, along with AP and honors classes, as they awaited word on college admissions and financial aid packages. At press

time, Jenni had received early-action acceptance to Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey and DePaul University in Chicago. She anticipates hearing from other colleges on both coasts, including several in Washington, D.C., where she toured universities with ABC Board member Cynthia Marsh. Elise has been accepted at Pace University in New York City and St. John Fisher College in Rochester, New York, and is waiting to hear from a few more colleges.



Elise Cabrera (left) and Jenni Nguyen, at the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary gala. Photo by Julia Finlayson

After getting involved in social causes, Jenni is now considering a career in urban planning. To help her explore the field before college, ABC connected Jenni with a professional urban planner in Boston and helped her land internships with social-service nonprofits. As a first-generation American from a Vietnamese and Laotian family, Jenni continues to serve on the committee of the Dorchester Organizing and Training Initiative, which supports Vietnamese families facing deportation and housing displacement. "We help young Vietnamese have a voice in government," she explained. For her AHS Capstone Research Project, Jenni is examining "the intersection of culture and urban planning" in Detroit.

Julie Ireland Childs, a professional college coach and ABC Board member, guided the seniors through the college application process. Jenni is a finalist in the QuestBridge program, which matches deserving students with colleges offering generous financial aid.

By Susan Greco



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## Alumni share experiences and ideas...continued from pg. 1

"When the alumni came to the ABC House, it was so fun," said scholar Jenni Nguyen '18. "They related to everything we're going through--the social interactions at the house and the social tensions at the high school," she said. Nguyen is seeking an alumni mentor to help guide her college career. "College is a whole new terrain. I know I'll need help with how to manage the financial stuff," she said.

Both alumni and scholars expressed a desire to attend more reunions and connect through social media. ABC is in the early stages of building an alumni engagement program that will include regional events and an online presence. The ABC of Andover board plans to convene an alumni leadership team of graduates from each class or decade. The goal is to have a database of alumni profiles and contact information, regional meet-ups, mentorships for current scholars, and alumni visits to Andover.

"Having a presence in their lives is really what matters here," Keisha Nikelle King '96 wrote to the ABC of Andover board. Interested alumni should contact ABC at [alumni@AndoverABC.org](mailto:alumni@AndoverABC.org).

– By *Susan Greco*



Bill Rolon, '85

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## Career day visit



ABC scholars recently toured the Burlington office of Salesforce. Among the employees who described the business software company to them were (front, center) Lori Barsalou, an ABC Board member, and (behind her) Vicky Nawoichyk, an employee engagement manager. The students (from left) are Skye Padovani, Megan Casey, Olamide Olayinka, Abigail Shugert, Leannette Garcia, Mafoudia Keita and Jenni Nguyen.

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We Do



**Mission:** *Closing the education gap for students of color in American society.*

We bring motivated students from underperforming schools to live in Andover, where they attend Andover High School to better prepare for college. Thanks to donor generosity, we provide these scholars with a house on Main Street and a complete network of support and love.

**Enrollment:** 8 scholars currently from Florida, New York, and California

**Results:** All 140 graduates over our 50 years have entered high-level colleges and universities.

## ABC alumna wins Fulbright

ABC of Andover alumna Felicia Reyes (AHS '13, University of Southern California '17) has been awarded a Fulbright Scholarship to teach English in Mexico.

Her primary job will be an English Teaching Assistantship from August to May. She also may provide educational services to others who need them in the local community.

