

MONTHLY MENTORING NEWSLETTER

December 2008

Our Star of the Month



We would like to highlight a special Mentor/Mentee relationship each month and I am excited to be able to share a very special success story of a long time mentor with STAMP.

I would like to introduce you all to City Employee, Gerry Katz and her mentee, Alyssa Thomas.

Gerry and Alyssa have been working together since the program began in 2005. They began working together at our after school program with Boys & Girls Club of Stamford. Gerry is a Grants Coordinator with the City of Stamford and Alyssa is now a 5th grade student at New Canaan Country School. When they joined the STAMP program Alyssa was a second grade student at Stamford's Waterside School.

Gerry and Alyssa are what we think about when you say "success story" and we wanted you all to get a chance to meet them. Here they talk in their own words about what Mentoring has meant to them.

Alyssa: What I like best about being in the STAMP Program... I like doing the different kinds of activities that Gerry and I do together each week. Some of my favorites are playing games like

Important Dates in December:

Hanukkah - 12/21 - 29
Christmas - 12/25
Kwanzaa - 12/26 - 1/1

SCHOOL CLOSINGS:

12/24 - 31 - Holiday Recess, no school

SCHOOL EARLY RELEASE

DAYS:

12/9-11 Elementary School Early Release for Report cards
12/17 - All early release for Staff Development
12/23 - All early release for Holiday Recess

STAMP

Stamford Mentoring Partnership

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Program Coordinator
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203-977-5515 (fax)



We at Youth Services would like to wish everyone a happy Holiday Season.

During this season of giving we would like to thank you for giving the greatest gift of all — your time and yourself!

Your efforts will not be forgotten or go unnoticed.

Much love, health, peace, and happiness to you and your families.

The team at Youth Services

Terri Drew
Michelle Lappas
Justin Labaire
Bob Kocienda
Lindsey Waggaman

The STAMP Mentoring Site

Locations are as follows:

Westover Magnet Elementary :

Site Coordinator -
Mitch West (Social Worker)

412 Stillwater Avenue
Stamford, CT 06902
977-5874

mwest@ci.stamford.ct.us

Stillmeadow Elementary

Site Coordinator -

Lisa Cammarota

800 Stillwater Road
Stamford, CT 06902
977-4507

lcammarota@ci.stamford.ct.us

Cloonan Middle School:

Site Coordinator -

Laura Marino (Social Worker)

11 West North Street
Stamford, CT 06902

203-977-4776

203-977-4867 (fax)

lmario@ci.stamford.ct.us

Trailblazers Middle School:

Site Coordinator -

Julie Foy (Dir. Family Resources)

Scalzi Park/or PO Box 15588

Stamford, CT 06901

203-977-5690x26

jfoy@trailblazersacademy.org

Boys & Girls Club of Stamford

Site Coordinator -

Mark R. Ferrer (Dir. Of Operations)

347 Stillwater Ave.

Stamford, CT 06902

203-324-0594

mrf@bgcastamford.org

Chester Addison Comm Center

Site Coordinator -

Melissa Bramble (Director)

245 Selleck Street

Stamford, CT 06902

203-348-6491 x201

203-351-0601 (fax)

203-219-1617 (cell)

mbaxendale@domuskids.org

CTE Community Center

Site Coordinator -

Rasheem Coleman

34 Woodland Ave.

Stamford, CT 06902

203-977-4880

rcoleman@ctecap.org

Blokus, puzzle games and the activities in the Nickelodeon magazine, Fun Puzzles & Games.

Gerry: *What I like best about being in the STAMP Program... It has been a delight to watch Alyssa grow from an inquisitive 2nd grader to the intelligent young lady she has become. She works very hard at school, is a terrific reader and has lots of outside interests like dancing, soccer, and volleyball.*

Alyssa: *Why did you [Gerry] want to become a mentor?*

Gerry. *I wanted to become a mentor because I wanted to be involved in the life of a young person. I have two daughters of my own who are grown now and I wanted to have a relationship with someone who could keep me updated on what children are doing today and who would benefit from my experience with my two daughters.*

Gerry: *Why did you [Alyssa] want to have a mentor?*

Alyssa. *I wanted to try something new and learn from someone who was wiser.*

Alyssa: *It was hard sometimes to explain who Gerry was at the Boys & Girls Club. Friends would ask who she was and I would say she is a friend, not a tutor, just a friend. In the beginning friends would ask questions, but then they ended up asking if they could have mentors also.*

Gerry: *I wondered if it would be difficult for Alyssa to have a mentor who is old enough to be her grandmother. I wondered if we could communicate and if I*

What is KWANZAA?

The year 2008 will see the 43rd annual [Kwanzaa](#), the African American holiday celebrated from December 26 to January 1. It is estimated that some 18 million African Americans take part in Kwanzaa.

Kwanzaa is not a religious holiday, nor is it meant to replace Christmas. It was created by Dr. [Maulana "Ron" Karenga](#), a professor of Black Studies, in 1966. At this time of great social change for African Americans, Karenga sought to design a celebration that would honor the values of ancient African cultures and inspire African Americans who were working for progress.

Kwanzaa is based on the year-end harvest festivals that have taken place throughout [Africa](#) for thousands of years. The name comes from the [Swahili](#) phrase "matunda ya kwanza," which means "first fruits of the harvest." Karenga chose a phrase from Swahili because the language is used by various peoples throughout Africa.

The Seven Principles (Nguzo Saba)

Each of the seven days of Kwanzaa honors a different principle. These principles are believed to have been key to building strong, productive families and communities in Africa. During Kwanzaa, celebrants greet each other with "Habari gani," or "What's the news?" The principles of Kwanzaa form the answers.

The Principles of Kwanzaa

umoja (*oo-MOH-ja*)

Meaning: unity

Action: building a community that holds together

kujichagulia (*koo-jee-cha-goo-LEE-yah*)

Meaning: self-determination

Action: speaking for yourself and making choices that benefit the community

ujima (*oo-JEE-mah*)

Meaning: collective work and responsibility

Action: helping others within the community

ujamaa (*oo-JAH-ma*)

Meaning: cooperative economics

Action: supporting businesses that care about the community

nia (*nee-AH*)

Meaning: a sense of purpose

Action: setting goals that benefit the community

kuumba (*koo-OOM-bah*)

Meaning: creativity

Action: making the community better and more beautiful

really had something to offer her, it didn't take long to realize that we were a great pair. She's so bright and has so many questions that we have lots to talk about and our hour a week flies by.

***Alyssa:** I look forward to staying in the STAMP program as I grow older. We were able to work out my staying in the program now that I am at New Canaan Country School so I think that we will be friends for a long time.*

***Gerry:** When Alyssa was accepted at New Canaan Country School, I wondered how we would arrange our weekly meetings. With the help of Alyssa's Mom, we were able to work out a Wednesday schedule. Alyssa's Mom also works for the City of Stamford and we have become friends as a result of the STAMP Program. I look forward to being Alyssa's mentor and friend for a very long time.*

*Gerry Katz and
Alyssa Thomas*

imani (*ee-MAH-nee*)

Meaning: faith

Action: believing that a better world can be created for communities now and in the future

Colorful Celebrations

Families gather for the great feast of karamu on December 31. Karamu may be held at a home, community center, or church. Celebrants enjoy traditional African dishes as well as those featuring ingredients Africans brought to the United States, such as sesame seeds (benne), peanuts (groundnuts), sweet potatoes, collard greens, and spicy sauces. Especially at karamu, Kwanzaa is celebrated with red, black, and green. These three colors were important symbols in ancient Africa that gained new recognition through the efforts of Marcus Garvey's Black Nationalist movement. Green is for the fertile land of Africa; black is for the color of the people; and red is the for the blood that is shed in the struggle for freedom.

The Seven Symbols

Celebrants decorate with red, black, and green as well as African-style textiles and art. At the heart of Kwanzaa imagery, however, are the seven symbols.

The Seven Symbols of Kwanzaa

kikombe cha umoja

Meaning: the unity cup

Action: Celebrants drink from this cup in honor of their African ancestors. Before drinking, each person says "harambee," or "let's pull together."

kinara

Meaning: the candleholder, which holds seven candles

Action: It said to symbolize stalks of corn that branch off to form new stalks, much as the human family is created.

mazao

Meaning: fruits, nuts, and vegetables

Action: These remind celebrants of the harvest fruits that nourished the people of Africa.

mishumaa saba

Meaning: the seven candles that represent the seven principles

Action: A different candle is lit each day. Three candles on the left are green; three on the right are red; and in the middle is a black candle.

mkeka

Meaning: mat

Action: The symbols of Kwanzaa are arranged on the mkeka, which may be made of straw or African cloth. It symbolizes the foundation upon which communities are built.

vibunzi (*plural, muhindi*)

Meaning: ear of corn

Action: Traditionally, one ear of corn is placed on the mkeka for each child present.

zawadi

Meaning: gifts

Action: Traditionally, educational and cultural gifts are given to children on January 1, the last day of Kwanzaa.