

The Open Door

Boys & Girls Club of Greater Lowell · Spring 2017



“The staff at the Club support me and push me to achieve my goals and future plans. The staff go out of their way to talk to me about my future.” **Tori, age 15**

Our tagline proudly declares “Great Futures Start Here”, however, statistics show that children who come from low income households (as 96% of our members do) are far less likely to become successful adults than their more affluent peers. Studies by the Urban Institute point to several factors that lead to this gap - low income families move more, which places stress on children as they are adapting to new environments. Additionally, the neighborhoods in which they live often are riddled with violence, which causes ‘toxic stress’ for the kids who live there making it challenging to concentrate on school work. Additionally, parents who are struggling to make ends meet have little time to focus on their child’s homework and achievement.

You are an integral part of the community at the Boys & Girls Club helping youth in Lowell build a bright future for themselves. By providing a safe haven where youth feel safe, find positive adult role models, and programs designed to provide the assistance in college readiness that parents can’t always offer, you are helping teens in Lowell achieve their dreams of financial independence.

Read on to hear about current members who are still carving out their plan, recent Alumni who are in college thanks to their time at the Club, and a young woman who broke the cycle of poverty and now works as a nurse in her community. I invite you to read on to learn about the impact your support has on the future of our teens and our community. - **Joe Hungler**, Executive Director

Music Leads The Way

Before Nicolas Figueroa, age 17, joined the Boys & Girls Club last year he practiced playing the piano by “drawing the keys (of the piano) on a piece of notebook paper.” Now, he says, he has access to “everything you’d ever want” at the Boys & Girls Club. Most of Nicolas’ time at the Club is spent in the Music Clubhouse, where his love of singing and playing piano and guitar drive him to come to the Club each day right after school, staying until the Club closes at 8:00 PM.

Nicolas’ dedication to the Music Clubhouse earned him a spot as a Youth Leader, because he “loves being here, and wanted to be here more.” In this role he teaches younger members how to play the guitar or keyboard, helps clean

and organize the Clubhouse, and encourages insecure, budding musicians to try something new. He loves the moment when he shows a younger member something they’ve never seen before and shares that “it feels good to have the additional responsibility.”

Omar Miranda, Music Clubhouse Director, says “In the short time he has been coming to the Club, Nicolas has grown so much. **He is now focused and driven to be successful** – he comes in each day and asks how he can help.” The Youth Leader position (made possible through funding from the Music & Youth Initiative) allows Nicolas to earn a small paycheck at the Club, which he uses to help his family pay the bills.

When asked about his future, Nicolas says he dreams of going to college for music somewhere like Berklee College of Music in Boston. As part of the Music Clubhouse program, Nicolas recently had the

opportunity to play at a showcase at Berklee. Being a part of the Club program has “opened up gateways” that make him feel good about himself. He says emphatically **“everything you do here has a positive effect on your future.”**



Nicolas entertains the audience at the recent Annual Meeting of the Boys & Girls Club

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ON TRACK TO A BRIGHT FUTURE

For many of our Club members, navigating the path to college is a daunting prospect. For most low income youth, the adults in their lives don't have experience themselves with college - therefore visiting college campuses, sorting through application materials, and picking a college that will help them achieve their goals is out of reach.

Your support helps break down this barrier to success through programs like Diplomas 2 Degrees, where teens can meet weekly and access the resources they need to move forward with their dreams. Here is what some of our recent graduates have shared about how the Club has impacted their future:

Marcus Saint-Louis, Sophomore, UMass Lowell – “The Club had a lot of college readiness programs and other programs where successful business people come to the Club. This gave us the opportunity to talk to them and ask questions. Because of this, I knew that college was the only step for me after high school in order to create a successful future for myself. I am a firm believer that my future is brighter because of my time spent at the club.”

Jose Molina, Senior, UMass Lowell – “Applying for college was very nerve racking but there was always someone at the club who I could rely on to help me along the process. I went on college tours through the Club, applied for and received scholarships and even made connections with people



Teens at the Club discuss their goals with staff member Ricky Hai

working in universities through Boys & Girls Club events. “

Jose believes the Club helped shape him into a responsible adult, saying “I took on leadership roles at the Club and became a mentor to younger members. I volunteered hundreds of hours at the Club, assisted in serving thousands of meals, planned out and ran fundraisers through Keystone and even presented at a conference. The Club taught me how to handle responsibility, the importance of giving back and to not take the opportunities provided to me for granted. All while simultaneously increasing my confidence, allowing me to believe in myself when taking on new tasks.” Jose’s dedication to volunteerism didn’t dwindle in college, earning him the Chancellors Medal for Diversity and Inclusion and the Political

Science Department award for Outstanding Leadership and Community Service, among other accolades.

Jose’s future includes continuing in his commitment to serving others. “I have been accepted into the Peace Corps program and will be flying out to Costa Rica this July. I have committed to work as a Youth Development Coordinator for two years, working with community leaders, school, psychiatrists and families to run assessments and hopefully improve the quality of life for the Costa Rican youth.”

Nde Nkimbeng, Junior, Worcester Polytechnic Institute - “At the Club, I learned the importance of respect and that in life there are consequences for all your actions whether good or bad. I learned that I have to take responsibilities for my actions.”



At the Club, Nde was able to discover his passion and begin his path to a bright future. "Through D2D I was able to learn about different occupations. There was one particular event where D2D staff brought in an engineer. Hearing the job description of an engineer and the potential job outlook fascinated me and influenced my decision to study Mechanical Engineering at Worcester Polytechnic Institute."

Nde's future is certainly bright "This summer I am interning at Ford Motor Company Buffalo Stamping Plant in Buffalo, NY as a Manufacturing Engineering Intern and last summer I interned at Pratt & Whitney in East Hartford, CT also as a Manufacturing Engineering Intern. When I graduate next year I hope to work full time in manufacturing and later get a Masters in Engineering Management."

He goes on to describe how his life would be different if not for the Club, and the community that supports the Club: "Because of the Club I was able to blossom into an outgoing and enthusiastic scholar. Even though I have graduated from the Boys & Girls Club I will always remain involved and give back."

With your support, each year more and more young people at the Boys & Girls Club discover the passion, resolve and resources they need to redirect their future and defy the statistics. ■

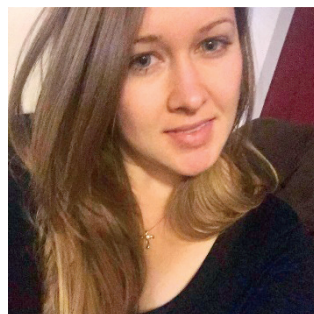
LIFE AFTER THE BOYS & GIRLS CLUB

"Without the Boys & Girls Club.....I honestly don't know where I'd be, or who I'd be. I may have become just another statistic, someone who settled for what they grew up seeing."

Like most of the members at the Boys & Girls Club of Greater Lowell, Michelle grew up in a low income neighborhood where she admits she did not see many examples of "successful adults." After joining the Club at age 9, Michelle found the Club had "everything we wished we'd have at home: gym, toys, pool, staff and friends who felt like family."

After her mother passed away when she was 16, Michelle leaned on the Club and the staff who **"helped me channel my many emotions into making positive changes in my life."** She took a lifeguarding class and got her first job. She found that staff at the Club modeled a different way of life and opened her eyes to new opportunities. "They had college degrees. They were happy and comfortable. They had a safe place to go at night. I knew one day I wanted that."

Upon graduating from high school, Michelle went to Salem State University and became the first person in her family to graduate from college. She is rightfully proud that she has been a practicing Registered Nurse for 5 years now, working at a visiting nursing agency and saving up to purchase her first home. However, she says her proudest accomplishment to date is working at the Boys & Girls Club from age 16 – 22. **"I know that if I was able to positively affect even one of those Club kids, that I have made a positive impact in not only them but also my community. I have given back a little of what I received as a kid and that's something money cannot buy."**



Michelle Taylor, former Club member and staff, currently working as an RN

"The Boys & Girls club gave me the opportunity to earn my first paycheck, and that in itself was huge for me."

— Michelle Taylor,
photographed as a Summer
Program Staff member





Nicolas sings a song at the State Youth of the Year celebration.

Help Build Bright Futures – Become A Club Ally Today!

Club Allies play an integral role in sustaining the day-to-day operations at the Club, and programs like Diplomas 2 Degrees and Leaders in Training which help youth in Lowell get started on their path to a great future. By making a monthly contribution, Club Allies increase the impact of their giving and help bridge the gap between our low membership fee (just \$5 for our teen members, \$30 for all other members) and the cost of operating the Boys & Girls Club.

Now you can increase your impact even further by joining the Club Allies this spring! If 200 supporters join the Club Allies before June 30th, the Club will receive a matching gift of \$10,000 from a generous anonymous donor.

Complete the enclosed envelope today, or go online to join – www.lbgc.org to make your commitment to the youth of Lowell. ■



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