

College Summit for Inner City High School Seniors

Building One Child at a Time

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Imagine growing up thinking you are a nobody and that you do not have a future. Imagine being frustrated within a school system that may not have a counselor that has the time to give a high school student the time or resources to take care of college placement issues such as selecting a college, receiving financial aid, or taking ACT or SAT tests for college placement. Imagine that you have had adversities in life that made you believe you would not make it, well, these are only a few scenarios which impact a lot of youth who College Summit, Inc. targets as participants of a program that is designed for a child who needs love, inspiration, resources, and a plan for success.

The concept of College Summit is simple. Bring together inner city high school seniors with professionals who can counsel them effectively and assist with crucial steps to get them through their final year in school. Selected high school seniors are invited to attend informative and intensive workshops that increase self-esteem and confidence through writing workshops where students will create a personal college essay, college counseling sessions that will give students, a customized career path and college list to work with, financial workshops that will give students an overview of scholarships and financial aid resources available, along with intensive personal "rap" sessions that address students issues in a very direct and personal way. College Summit originally started in 1993 with four students in a Teen Center in a basement of a low income project in Washington, D.C and it has now reached several states including Illinois, St. Louis, California, West Virginia and a host of other cities. It has really expanded beyond a basement, it now takes students to many college campuses across this nation where they can begin to build themselves up with a plan to enter college.

Students in the College Summit program generally transition from high school and enter college. The college placement rate is 80% overall of students who have participated in the program. The main ingredient to this wonderful program is the peer to peer impact along with Alumni members who have 'graduated' from the program who serve as mentors to students in leadership, coordinating and other roles. Students generally spend four-days on a college campus where they receive lodging and meals for the entire weekend. Students attend workshops that will focus on decision-making, communication, financial aid, and career counseling assist the students with a clear purpose and direction.

Career professionals that work with the participants come from all walks of life, from entrepreneurs to seasoned college counselors, writers, artists and former Alumni of the program are the foundation from which the students draw their inspiration and strength. College Summit staff focuses on increasing student's knowledge and help them to prepare them for their last year of high school. Writing Coaches take the students through the writing process from first drafts of a college statement to a polished essay that reflects the student's authentic voice and personality. Many students come to College Summit with various skill levels and get a chance to increase their writing ability through the editing and revision process. College Counselors with the program conduct intensive interviews with the students and review each student's high school transcript and career choices and then develop a customized college listing and suggestions for meeting their academic and college goals. Mentors with the program conduct individual and group sessions where students can share their life stories and bond with other participants in an informal setting.

Generally, each college summer participant has the opportunity to visit a college campus, stay in a dorm, and see college life. Students get the chance to see what each college has to offer and get an opportunity to interact with college staff and students.

What's more special than the workshops and the bonding at College Summit? The experience of having several adults work on each student has a powerful effect. Some of the students, who have had life challenges or obstacles, have a chance to connect on an emotional level with staff, other students, and are changed by human connectedness. Student's self-esteem is increased along with receiving unconditional love, mentoring and support that allows their inner personalities to shine. Students are left with a sense of achievement that replaces any negativity they may have felt before walking through the college doors. Sharing their journey with their peers allows them to believe in dreams that otherwise would be left in their head without a clear plan. Before they attend the workshop activities, their dreams are very unreal because they have not created a blueprint of their young lives, but as they get to connect at College Summit, things become clear and more real.

The program fosters more than college placement. It empowers youth to continue to be bold, powerful, talented young men and women. Participants have access to an online community of resources through College Summit that connects them directly to colleges and their peers. At the end of their journey with the program, students will have their a packet of information including, a working college list, a list of objectives to complete at the end of their Senior year, their personal college essay, and referrals from College Counselors and Writing Coaches. This packet of information is easily accessed to College Summit partner schools that will have a chance to use the information when students apply to enter college with that specific institution.

College Summit's core values are to build one child at a time, and I believe it's succeeding. As a past volunteer, I have experiences that have touched me beyond helping

a child to write their college essay. As I meet these young people, I have seen the potential shining in their inquisitive eyes. I have hugged a young person who has previously thought they had no chance with their future. I have seen the positive impact on youth who just simply needed guidance and support.

If you are interested in signing up as a Volunteer, I encourage you to visit the official website of College Summit at www.collegesummit.org to apply. Why not plant a seed of hope or inspiration with a youth person who craves knowledge and needs to be guided in the right direction.

It does take a village to raise a child, and College Summit, continues this simplistic theme every year, in every student who gets the chance to see hope rise from a dream to reality. Building one child at a time, is what College Summit does successfully using a few simple things - youth, colleges, and resourceful people, to build a generation that can set the world on fire!