

# SAVED BY AN EDUCATION:

A Successful Model for Dramatically  
Increasing High School Graduation Rates  
in Low Income Neighborhoods

*"A solution as radical as the  
school dropout problem."*

A Report on the  
Public Housing Graduates (PHG) Demonstration



Center for Community Change  
May 2001

*“We fund these demonstration programs, then we don’t do enough about what we’ve learned from them.”*

—Mary Jean LeTendre,  
Office of Elementary and Secondary Education

The primary purpose of this report is to encourage and help people start a PHG-type program in their communities. This is why we have included considerable detail about the program’s design and replication as well as why we added a chapter on the lessons we learned.

It is also why we are making available many of the materials we used in PHG. To receive a list of the materials, ask questions or receive technical assistance, contact:

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# Acknowledgments

**T**oo often protocol accounts for the "Acknowledgments" in many publications. In this instance, however, it is not at all protocol but sincere gratitude with which the Center for Community Change acknowledges the generous and broad range of support it received in the Public Housing Graduates Demonstration's funding, design and implementation.

Primary among supporters was HUD Secretary Henry Cisneros, who had faith in the radical, untested vision of PHG and thus found the money to launch it.

Other key organizations and individuals who helped start and continued to support PHG included HUD officials Sonya Bargos, Bertha Jones and H. David Reeves; Judge Iraline Barnes, former Vice President for Corporate Affairs at the Potomac Electric Power Company; David Gilmore, Receiver of the District of Columbia Housing Authority (site of the Demonstration) and his staff, John Hampton and Joy Yeldell; representatives of resident councils within the Housing Authority; Drs.

Alethia Spraggins and Elizabeth Smith, former administrators in the DC Public School System; Hugh Price, President of the National Urban League; and Dr. Dorothy Height, President of the National Council of Negro Women.

We are also grateful to the dozens of collaborating organizations listed in this publication. They generously permitted the Center to include aspects of their programs as core components of PHG.

We appreciate the work of Annette Duke of the Massachusetts Law Reform Institute, who poured through reams of PHG information to assemble this report, and of Tim Saasta, who edited and produced the report and wrote the introduction and "lessons learned" chapter.

And we acknowledge our dedicated staff and the students and their parents. You were the PHG Demonstration!

We sincerely thank you!

—*Othello W. Poulard*

Most photos by Earl Dotter—EarlDotter.com (pages 2, 4, 15, 21, 24, 31, 59). Other photos by PHG staff. Cover illustration by Sharon Lowe, Shoreline Photo Design.



# Introduction

**A**shocking 60% of children living in public housing who enter the 8<sup>th</sup> grade never graduate from high school. The dropout rates for children growing up in other very low income communities are not much lower, often exceeding 50%.

At a time when a high school degree is the absolute minimum for a decent job, how can these rates be so high? Why have they remained high for so long? What are the consequences for individuals who drop out and for their communities and society as a whole? Most important, what can be done to remedy this problem?

In five public housing communities in the nation's capital, the Public Housing Graduates Demonstration — “PHG” — provided a model of what can be done. PHG provided a broad range of essential supports to nearly all the 8<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> graders living in five public housing developments in Washington, DC. As a result:

- 88% of PHG's participants graduated or were still in school, according to an evaluation of the program's first year.
- Over PHG's three years, nearly 90% (89.6%) of its students who entered their senior year graduated, compared to just

63% for students who attended the same schools.

- PHG participants had a significantly higher grade point average (.65 higher on a 4.0 scale) and higher test scores than a control group.
- PHG inspired 70% of its graduating students to apply to college or trade school, with every one of them being accepted, and every one who applied for financial aid receiving it.
- Over the three years, only one 12<sup>th</sup> grader failed to graduate because of pregnancy or incarceration.

**P**HG began in 1997, after the Center for Community Change's Othello Poulard had spent years working with public housing communities across the country. Seeing first-hand how many young people living in public housing were dropping out of school, he decided something had to be tried that was comprehensive enough to get these teenagers to stay in school, graduate *and* see a future for themselves.

Working with a broad range of other people who shared his deep concern,

Poulard put together an approach to the drop-out crisis “that is as radical as the problem,” in Poulard’s words.

It focused not just on the schools, but also on what happens to children *outside* of school. Do they have a place to study at home. A computer? Do they have parents who see the connection between doing well in school now and doing well in life later? How do these students spend their time after school? Do they have access to tutoring and mentoring if they need them?

It focused not on one part of the solution — a mentoring program or a tutoring program, for example — but on *every* part. It built after-school tutoring centers in the five public housing developments. It hired skilled, long-term tutors. It did mentoring. It exposed the students to colleges as well as culture. It trained them to use computers. It made sure they had access to a computer at home. It provided recreation. It taught them

how to avoid pregnancy and deal with violence. It provided financial as well as emotional support. And much more.

In essence, says Poulard, PHG merely tried to provide the supports that most middle class children routinely find in their families and their communities. To see if the model would work, HUD’s former Secretary Henry Cisneros decided to help fund this approach at the five public housing developments in Washington, DC.

“One reform in one school isn’t really reform — it’s a mere anecdote,” Poulard explains. “One program — no matter how good it is — isn’t enough to provide a model for reform. If we continue to use the same basic approach to educating our children, we doom far too many of them to failure.”

**P**reventing young people from dropping out of schools “has remained one of education’s most daunting dilemmas,” according to an article in *Youth Today*.

Dropping out is a problem in all schools, not just in those with large numbers of low income children. This is especially true when you look beyond the percentage of students who drop out in one year, which was 11% in 1997, according to the Department of Education. More important is the percentage of students who enter high school but don’t graduate. “We’re probably losing about one out of every four ninth grade students,” says Jay Smink, director of the National Dropout Prevention Center at Clemson University.

The dropout rate in urban schools serving mostly low income students is at least 50%, according to the Johns Hopkins



*Former HUD Secretary Henry Cisneros, an early PHG supporter.*

University's Center for the Social Organization of Schools. The Center says that much of the nation's dropout problem is concentrated in a few hundred high schools in 35 of the nation's largest cities.

"This is unacceptable," Poulard believes. "It's unacceptable for these children. It's unacceptable for our country. *And it's unnecessary!* Four out of five people in jail do not have a high school diploma. This is a crisis we cannot ignore."

This problem has dire consequences, not just for these young people themselves, but for the entire society. In 1999, 3.8 million young people were not in school and did not have a degree, according to the Department of Education.

Young people without a degree earn about 25% less than those with a degree who did not attend college, according to the National Center for Educational Statistics. Dropouts are 50% more likely to be unemployed than high school graduates. They are three times more likely to receive public assistance.

Many who drop out become almost completely disconnected: they aren't in school or in the military, working or married. "Those who remain disconnected for three or more years suffer long-term consequences," writes Bret Brown, a researcher at Child Trends, which did a long-term study of 4000 young people.

"Too many of them get lost permanently...and become part of the social phenomena...of long-term welfare-dependency, persistent poverty and many of the other familiar social ills." Brown concluded that more than one-third of America's youth are disconnected in this way.

"Poverty and the dropout rate are inextricably linked," Poulard believes. "If you want to do something about our unacceptably high level of poverty, you have to do something to dramatically lower the dropout rate."

**I**n the late 1980s, the federal government decided to try to find ways to deal with the dropout problem. Over the next 10 years, it invested about \$200 million in 88 dropout prevention programs around the country. Unfortunately, with a few exceptions, these programs "made almost no difference in preventing dropping out," according to an evaluation of this grant program done by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.

In fact, the evaluation found that, "Three years after entering the dropout prevention programs we studied, most students had dropped out."

It found that the programs that focused on high school rather than middle school students had almost no chance of succeeding. "High school students may be too far behind their peers, and saddled with too many pressures and problems, for the intervention to succeed as well," concluded the article in *Youth Today*.

**B**ut despite this disappointing conclusion of this study and despite conventional wisdom about the need to intervene early, PHG succeeded by focusing entirely on high school-age students. Poulard believes it succeeded because it started with the premise that reforming a school — while critical — is not enough.

“So many of these teenagers and their families live such chaotic lives,” Poulard explains. “Often there is only one parent. That parent often must work two jobs to make ends meet. Or they struggle on welfare. There are often health problems. Emotional problems. There’s no place to study at home. There may be drugs and violence in the neighborhood.

“These students often start thinking and feeling very negative things about themselves, which can undercut their ability to do well in school.” The problems in many of these schools — crumbling buildings, too

few textbooks, teacher turnover, low expectations — just compound the challenge these young people face.

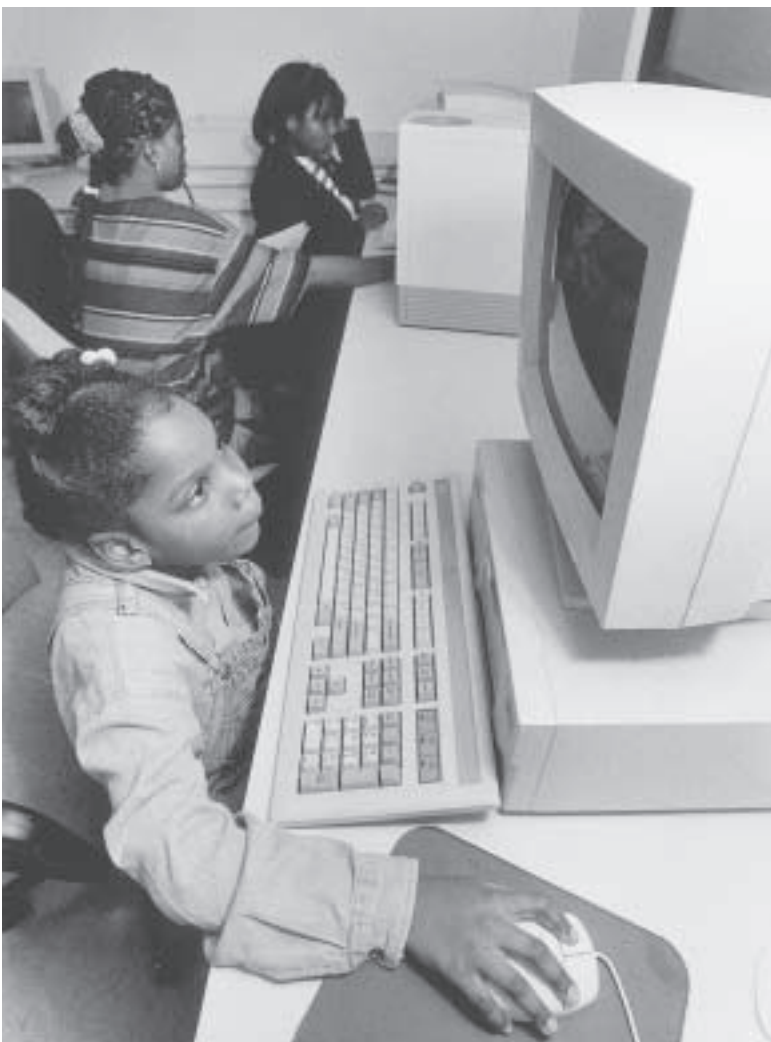
This is why relatively small reforms in these schools have minimal impact on dropout rates, Poulard believes. “If half the students who were scheduled to graduate from your school this year did not do so, I guarantee you that half the students who should graduate next year also will not do so. The only way to significantly raise the graduation rate is for schools to fundamentally change what they are doing.”

“To inspire achievement among freshmen, you really have to do something radical,” agrees Elizabeth Useem, a researcher with the Philadelphia Education Fund.

**T**he key, Poulard believes, is to focus less intensively on the schools and more on the students. Focus on what they need in order to do well in school. Then find ways to meet these needs, both inside *and* outside school.

“You have to meet the students where they are,” says Poulard. “What do they need to advance through school? How can you get them what they need?”

This belief led to one of the most radical ideas underlying PHG: participating students were *paid* a work/study allowance to participate. They received \$100 a month in 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grade, \$200 a month in 12<sup>th</sup> grade. To qualify for this money, they had to participate in almost daily after-school activities, along with weekend college readiness sessions and field trips. They also had to produce journals along with detailed time sheets. They lost money every time they fell short of the requirements.



“When people hear about the stipends, they say, ‘You bribed these kids,’” explains Poulard. “I don’t care if you call it a bribe, it worked. That’s what counts. It dealt with the reality of where these kids are: they need money. If you want to engage so much of their time, you need to deal with this need. If you don’t, they will spend their out-of-school time working at some dead-end job or find some other way to get a little spending money.

“In middle-class communities, we call this financial support an allowance. And believe me, these students worked a lot harder than most children to get this allowance!”

**A**s important as it was in getting students into PHG, the stipends were but one relatively small part of the PHG approach. The key was being as comprehensive as possible, to provide a broad range of supports.

“For students in single-parent families, in poverty, with failing grades and disciplinary problems, programs intervening for one or two hours per day or less were not able to overcome these factors,” states the evaluation of the federally-funded dropout prevention programs.

PHG went well beyond intervening for an hour or two each day:

- Student centers were created in each of the five sites where students could be tutored, learn how to operate and repair computers, and participate in workshops on financial management, public speaking, anger management and much more. The centers were also a safe and quiet place for students to study.

- To help students feel connected to experiences and institutions that are outside their neighborhoods, PHG worked with several partners such as local colleges. Twice a month the students visited college campuses, learning what it took to be college-ready. The students also went to several cultural and other events.
- Because of the role computers play in today’s work world, students not only had access to computers and the Internet at their student centers, they also received a computer for their homes.
- Because pregnancy and incarceration often prevent low income teenagers from completing their education, PHG required each student to go through innovative jail divergence and pregnancy prevention programs.
- To insure a strong connection between the program and each student’s home, PHG identified and trained neighborhood residents to serve as “Mighty Moms” or “Mighty Pops.” They could play the role of a concerned aunt or grandparent, keeping an eye on the students and helping them with personal problems. PHG brought in a Big Brother/Big Sister program. Site coordinators and tutors also learned how to provide emotional as well as academic support.

This kind of support is crucial, according to the evaluation of the dropout prevention programs. The few that succeeded “had an adult who was basically acting like a cross between a counselor and a social worker.”

**I**n order to implement this broad range of results-oriented activities, PHG established partnerships with 34 local collaborating organizations.

“Lots of people understand the crisis in our schools and want to intervene,” explains Poulard. *“The key is getting them to believe that their compassion and their resources will be coordinated in a way that can really turn around the lives of a lot of young people.”*

“In every community I’ve been in, there are resources that parallel those we used. You need to find and enlist them. And what we found is that most groups *want* to participate in an approach like PHG. They want to feel that what they can offer adds up to something that can really make a long-term difference, not just in the life of one teenager, but many.”

The evaluation of the federal dropout programs also underscored the importance of this factor. “The evidence pointed to the strong connection those [successful] schools made with social services and community organizations.”

The one essential partner – indeed the partner that Poulard believes should be leading an effort like PHG in most communities – is the school system.

“The key is tying everything you do to what is happening in the schools. What is happening inside and outside the schools need to complement each other. That’s the heart of the problem today: school is a separate world, unconnected to the lives and realities of the students.”

*Poulard believes the key to making a PHG-type approach work is for someone within a school system to insist on this type of approach.*

“Whatever you call it is not important. The exact mix of programs and partners is not important. This is not rocket science. There is not some magic mathematical formula. It is basic common sense.”

The first step, he believes, is for a core group of people and institutions — school board members, principals, teachers, parent organizations, community groups — to decide that they must change their traditional way of educating children.

“We’ve got to ‘get out of the box’ and try something entirely new. We’ve got to deal with the realities of these kids’ lives apart from school. If we do that, we can dramatically lower dropout rates. And if we can do that, we’ve taken a big step towards dealing with one of the key causes of poverty in this country. We will be *preventing* poverty, not just ameliorating its devastating consequences.”



# Executive Summary

In 1997, the Center for Community Change (CCC) in Washington, D.C. began a three-year pilot program called the Public Housing Graduates Demonstration, PHG for short. The PHG Demonstration was based on the strong conviction that it is *necessary* and *possible* to develop an approach that can help a substantial number of economically disadvantaged teenagers improve their academic and personal performance, graduate from high school and take their next step into college, a career or more training.

PHG's premise was that, in order to achieve its goal, its approach and scope must be at least as radical as the problem which it sought to remedy. PHG wanted to try a radical approach because traditional approaches to the school dropout problem simply weren't working: If a school's dropout rate were high one year, you should expect it to be equally high the next year.

Even the dozens of drop-out prevention programs funded during the 1990s by the Department of Education "made almost no difference in preventing dropping out generally," according to the evaluation of this funding program. New approaches were desperately needed.

PHG's philosophy was that, by providing a constant infusion of academic and personal support, a community-based, school-supported initiative could help refuel entire communities of kids who saw little purpose to their education.

## THE PROBLEM

At an epidemic level, young people—especially young, low-income minority teens—are leaving the educational system and falling into life-altering predicaments which keep them chronically poor, dependent and vulnerable.

- **Up to 60% of the children in low-income minority neighborhoods leave school before graduating from high school.**
- **Each year**, over the last decade, there were at least **3.4 million** young people who were not in high school and lacked a high school diploma.
- In 1999, young people from low-income families were five times more likely to drop out of school than their counterparts from upper income families, a rate that

“We are not dealing here with the plight of a neglected few or a regional problem or a passing demographic blip. We are looking instead at long term trends which, if unaddressed, will alter the country’s future.”

—Annie E. Casey Foundation

has virtually remained unchanged for the past 10 years.

- Teen mothers are less likely to graduate from high school and are much more likely to live in poverty and to rely on welfare than their

peers who delay childbearing.

- High school students whose parents did not complete high school are more likely to drop out of school than students whose parents had at least some college education.

## PROGRAM DESIGN

In May 1997, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development awarded CCC a demonstration grant to test the PHG model in five public housing developments in Washington, D.C. The PHG Demonstration was strategically designed to intervene holistically in the lives of at-risk youth. The Demonstration’s holistic approach would:

- Be at least as radical as the problem it attempts to solve.
- Focus on the entire 8th–12th grade population of neighborhoods in order to demonstrate how to attract everyone in a target group.
- Provide a cash “incentive” that is sure to attract and retain the targeted students.
- Provide one-on-one, daily positive adult reinforcement and mentoring to help

students get to a place where they can learn.

- Strengthen relationships between schools and homes, students and their parents, students and their communities, and neighborhoods and service providers.
- Identify the layers of needs that young, low-income teens have and meet these needs in ways that develop the whole person—academically and personally—an approach that parallels parenting.
- Develop very broad-based collaborations with organizations that can provide the students with sustained personal and academic support.
- Create an affordable educational model that is replicable by schools.
- Use a small core staff who are visionary and dedicated and have the ability to understand and work with at-risk students.

For three years, PHG brought together educators, community people, human service workers, the public and private sector and large volunteer organizations to conduct the pilot in five low income neighborhoods.

## IMPACT

To measure PHG’s impact and make any needed corrections, an evaluation was conducted at the end of its first year by King and Naiker Consulting Group, Inc. PHG also maintained detailed records on its students in the following two years.

In summary, during the three years, PHG demonstrated that, with the right one-on-one teaching and support and the right interventions, a well-coordinated, intensive, neighborhood-based program can *radically*

increase high school graduation rates, even in one of the most troubled school districts in the country. Key results included:

- Virtually every 8th–12th grader in the five public housing developments targeted by the program participated in PHG.
- 88% of the students who enrolled graduated or were still in high school, according to the first-year evaluation.
- Not one PHG 12th grader failed to graduate because of pregnancy.
- PHG students had a substantially higher school attendance and lower truancy rate than non-PHG counterparts.
- 89.6% of the PHG Demonstration students who reached 12th grade graduated from high school.
- 26% of PHG Demonstration seniors graduated with a grade point average of 3.0 or above.
- Overall, PHG students had a significantly higher grade point average than non-PHG students.
- Only one 12th grader failed to graduate because of incarceration.
- 70% of PHG graduates applied to college or trade school.
- 100% of these students were accepted.
- 100% of the students accepted into college who applied for financial aid received at least \$4,100 in financial aid.

PHG also had other significant impacts:

- It established five neighborhood-based learning centers, with state-of-the-art computer labs. Students' ability to use computers soared.

- It provided and installed a personal computer for more than 250 PHG students in their homes.
- It brought resources and human services into the targeted neighborhoods, creating a model for how to provide essential services to targeted students at virtually no dollar cost.
- It strengthened the connections among schools, parents, homes and neighborhoods.

## REPLICATION

By design, the PHG Demonstration is readily replicable. PHG is an educational model which demonstrates that high dropout rates can be turned around. With a small core staff, PHG was able to craft a holistic approach to rescue teens from some very troubled neighborhoods, schools and families.

School boards and educators, whose mission is to improve overall academic standards, are in the best position to replicate PHG. **To adopt a PHG model, however, schools may need to stop doing business as usual and redeploy existing resources.**

“All too often, school board members are like firefighters on the ground, battling the flames, when they should be in a helicopter above the fire, able to see how extensive the blaze is, which way the wind is blowing, and where the resources need to be deployed.”

—Davis Campbell, Executive Director,  
California School Boards Association

The PHG model, tailored to accommodate the unique circumstances of local school districts, can be launched and operated with a small core staff, a handful of consultants and an array of neighborhood-based teams. PHG can serve as an alternative to the traditional approaches of an entire school district or school, or it may be replicated as an adjunct to the core, ongoing operation of a school district or school.

A linchpin in the replicability, design and implementation of PHG is working with collaborating organizations and programs. As PHG developed, it found an abundance of organizations willing to collaborate. Over the three years, it partnered with more than 34 organizations—at virtually no cost.

A number of factors attracted them to PHG, including:

- It used a holistic approach to helping young people help themselves.
- The partners would be part of a well-coordinated, multi-disciplinary effort.
- PHG's focus was on decreasing and preventing future poverty.
- PHG was able to reach and influence greater numbers of young people more effectively than a single approach.
- PHG provided its partners access into low-income communities with which they had no or little relationship.
- PHG's staff handled the logistics, sparing the collaborators of these hassles.

PHG's model also offers schools a way to target limited dollars to pay for a core staff that can garner hundreds of thousands of dollars in resources. Over the course of

its three-year demonstration, PHG raised more than \$525,000 in in-kind contributions. It also offers a way to coordinate existing programs so that they establish a sustained education program.

PHG is a model that has implications far beyond public housing. In reality, there are more children who are poor who don't live in public housing than who do live there.

Many entities can start the PHG ball rolling: school board members, superintendents, principals, parents, teachers unions, community groups or resident councils.

To assist those pursuing a PHG model in their community, the Center for Community Change has produced this publication. It has also prepared hands-on materials for each of PHG's components. These contain a substantial amount of the training, preparation, implementation and assessment materials developed over three years.

## CONCLUSION

PHG's potential is enormous. It was able to keep teenagers growing up in very troubled neighborhoods and families in school and on track to graduate and get more education or training.

The current drive for school reform must include a holistic approach that has the capacity to address home, societal, community and school-related factors that contribute to academic failure. Providing the necessary personal, developmental and academic supports is what it will take to increase academic success in low-income, minority communities.



# The Problem

“The real dropout numbers scare educators to death.”

*Steve Nielsen, Executive Director,  
Washington School Directors' Association<sup>1</sup>*

The consequences of ignoring or merely making minor responses to high school dropout rates in this country are severe. Young, low-income minority teens are leaving the educational system at an epidemic level, slipping into life-altering predicaments which keep them chronically poor, dependent and vulnerable.

- As many as 60% of the children in low-income minority neighborhoods leave school before graduating from high school.<sup>2</sup>

Unlike 40 or 50 years ago, when teens who dropped out of high school could begin jobs that would sustain them, now a high school diploma is a *minimum* requirement for entering the job market.<sup>3</sup> Those with it can compete for jobs and gain access to more education, career training, better incomes and more stable lives. Those without it are

more likely to be poor, unemployed, have low paying work, rely on public assistance and fall into the criminal justice system.

Yet, despite efforts across the country, there have been only limited gains made to *substantially* lower dropout rates. Each year, hundreds of thousands of young adults in the United States drop out of high school.

- Over the past decade, 347,000 to 544,000 10th-12th graders dropped out of high school each year.<sup>4</sup>

The cumulative effect of this yearly deluge has been millions of young people who are out of school and lack a high school degree.

- Each year over the last decade, there were at least 3.4 million young people who were not in high school and lacked a high school diploma.<sup>5</sup> (See chart on next page.)

**The Extent of the Dropout Problem: The Numbers Remain Unchanged**

Cumulative number of 16–24-year-olds in the United States not in high school and lacking a high school degree between 1990–1999

Millions	3.8	3.9	3.4	3.4	3.7	3.9	3.6	3.6	4.0	3.8
Year	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Dropout Rates in the U.S.: 1999.

**CONSEQUENCES AND COSTS**

Dropping out of high school is not an isolated incident that only affects individuals. Communities and the country as a whole also bear enormous consequences and costs.

- According to one estimate, 80% of all federal prisoners and 75% of youth involved in the juvenile court system are high school dropouts.<sup>6</sup>
- The average cost of incarceration is \$51,000 per prisoner, per year. Youth crime and truancy also increase the costs of police departments, courts and local service agencies.<sup>7</sup>
- In 1996, 25–34 year-olds who had dropped out of high school were three times more likely to receive public assistance than high school graduates who had not gone to college.<sup>8</sup>
- Teenage pregnancy poses a substantial financial burden on society, estimated at \$7 billion yearly in lost tax revenues, public assistance, child health care, foster care and involvement in the criminal justice system.<sup>9</sup>
- In 1996, earnings were approximately one-third less for those who did not graduate from high school than for those

who did and did not attend college (31% lower for males, 36% lower for females).<sup>10</sup>

- Young people with learning disabilities who do not complete high school have unemployment rates about 30% higher than those with disabilities who do graduate.<sup>11</sup>

If someone drops out and stays out of the workforce for very long, the consequences can last a lifetime, according to Bret Brown, a researcher at Child Trends, a youth issues organization.

After a 12-year study of 4,000 16–23 year-olds who were “at loose ends” and disconnected because they were not in school, working, married or in the military. Brown concluded:

“[T]hose who remained disconnected for three or more years suffer long-term consequences....Too many of them get lost permanently...and become part of the social phenomena...of long-term welfare-dependency, persistent poverty and many of the other familiar social ills....Youth losing their connection to society become bitter and aimless.”<sup>12</sup>

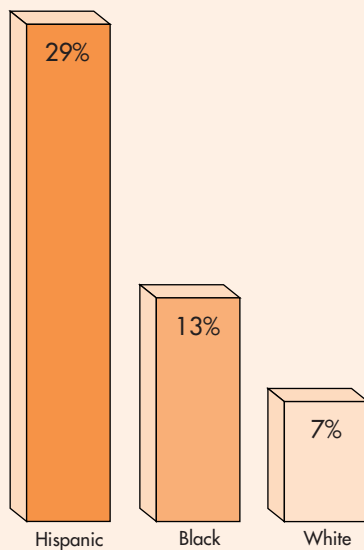
Brown concluded that more than one-third of America’s youth are disconnected. A

foundation that invests most of its resources in improving outcomes for low income children—the Annie E. Casey Foundation—agrees:

“The growth in the ranks of inactive teens constitutes one of the most disturbing measures of the youth crisis in the country. It is these young people for whom shortened education and lack of work experience have the most lasting and negative consequences.”

The long-term consequences of this disconnection are acute—drug addiction, chronic poverty, low self-esteem, poor health and, in too many cases, violent death.

### Who Is Most Likely to Drop Out?



Of the 3.8 million 16–24 year olds who had dropped out of high school and did not have a high school credential in 1999, Hispanic and Black youth have significantly higher dropout rates. In 1999, 29% of all Hispanic young adults and 13% of all Black young adults—compared to 7% of white young adults—were out of school without a high school credential.

Source: Dropout Rates in the United States: 1999, U.S. Department of Education.

- In 1994, the rate of young people being murdered in the United States was seven per day. Most were 15 to 17 years old.<sup>13</sup>

### WHO'S AT-RISK?

Young kids from low-income minority families and neighborhoods are most at risk of becoming casualties of the dropout epidemic.

- In 1999, young people from low-income families were five times more likely to drop out of school than their counterparts in upper income families, a rate that has virtually remained unchanged for the past 10 years.<sup>14</sup>
- Minority students also face the greater risk. In 1999, 29% of Hispanic young adults and 13% of Black young adults—compared to 7% of white young adults—were out of school without a high school degree.<sup>15</sup>

Often an unfortunate but real consequence of poverty is that parents themselves encourage young people to go to work rather than continue their education.

Young girls face the added risk of pregnancy at an age when they are financially and emotionally unequipped to become a parent.

- In one study conducted for the U.S. Department of Education, nearly one-third of 8th–10th grade females who dropped out of high school said it was because they were pregnant.<sup>16</sup>
- Teen mothers are less likely to graduate from high school and much more likely to live in poverty and rely on welfare than their peers who delay childbearing.<sup>17</sup>

- Although the rate of teen pregnancy in the United States has been declining, it remains the highest in the industrialized world, with approximately 1 million 15-19 year-old girls becoming pregnant every year.<sup>18</sup>

### What Puts Young People At Risk of Dropping Out?

#### School Related

Negative school climate  
Lack of relevant curriculum  
Disregard to student learning style  
Low expectations  
Language barrier  
Student/teacher conflict  
Passive instructional strategies  
Lack of adequate counseling  
Peer dropout  
Low grades  
Student victimization

#### Student Related

Negative attitude  
Learning disability  
Low self-esteem  
Drug and alcohol abuse  
Pregnancy  
Discipline Problems  
Working  
Health Problems

#### Family Related

Economic instability  
Little or no parental involvement  
Physical and mental abuse  
High frequency of moving  
Substance abuse in the family  
Low parental educational attainment

#### Community Related

Lack of support for public schools  
Lack of basic support services for families in need  
Peer pressure  
High crime  
Gang violence  
Lack of safe, decent neighborhoods and housing

Sources: At-risk Youth: Identification, Programs and Recommendations, S.E. Wells, Teacher Idea Press 1990, as referenced on [www.dropoutprevention.org](http://www.dropoutprevention.org), and U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Education Longitudinal Study of 1998.

### WHY ARE THEY AT RISK?

The reasons why so many teens are dropping out of high school are multiple and complex. The more trauma and instability in adolescents' lives, the more obstacles to their education and development, the more likely they will stumble.

Home life is a paramount factor which affects a young person's ability and desire to stay in school, perform well and graduate. When parents—in many cases single mothers—struggle to make ends meet, have two jobs or had children when they were teenagers, their ability to parent may be limited. These stresses may lead to abuse within a family.

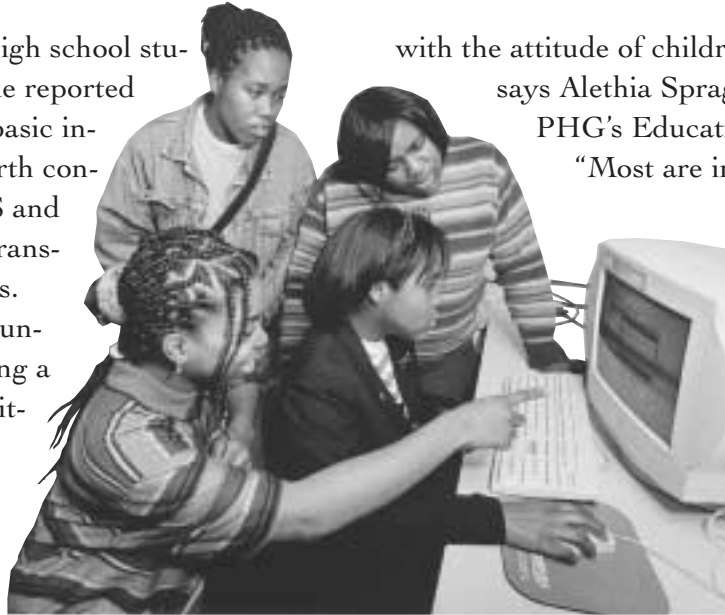
When children have been exposed to abuse and violence at home, this trauma can forge deep psychological barriers to learning. Violence also can become the way to resolve conflict, leading to more problems for these children in school.

When a family member has a chronic health problem, is addicted to drugs or is a recovering alcoholic, the stress at home may be unbearable. When parents themselves have limited education—or they don't value education—their ability to motivate their teens to study, stay in school, graduate or get more education may be severely impaired.

- Between 1992 and 1996, high school students whose parents did not complete high school were more than twice as likely to drop out of school as students whose parents had at least some college education.<sup>19</sup>
- Although 52% of white mothers and 58% of white fathers have a bachelor's or college degree, 54% of Hispanic mothers and fathers and approximately 22% of Black mothers and fathers have not even graduated from high school.<sup>20</sup>
- In one study, 13% of public school teachers reported that parent alcoholism and/or drug abuse were serious issues, and 28% reported that the lack of parent involvement was a serious problem. As parents' educational attainment increased, their participation in school activities went up.<sup>21</sup>

Young people who are in the process of learning how to cope with difficult issues also face challenges and temptations that are very different from those which young people faced decades ago.

- Nearly half of high school students nationwide reported that they need basic information on birth control, HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections. Nearly half are unaware that having a sexually transmitted infection increases the risk of getting HIV, if sexually active.<sup>22</sup>



*PHG set up computer labs at its five sites.*

- The National Center for Juvenile Justice reported that the number of youth between 10 and 17 who are arrested for violent crimes could more than double by the year 2010.<sup>23</sup>
- Homicide has been the leading cause of death among young black people ages 15-34 since 1978.<sup>24</sup>

Unfortunately, institutions on which we've historically relied to provide youth with adult support and guidance—families, schools and neighborhoods—have changed, dramatically reducing their capacity to deliver support.

There are many more single-parent households, meaning that parents have less time to support their children in school. Parents are working more hours. There are often fewer nearby family members who can provide support and/or role models. Similarly, there are fewer neighbors who have the time to provide support or who have a connection to a child's family.

"I worked in the deep, inner city in the District for many years and am familiar

with the attitude of children and parents," says Alethia Spraggins, Ph.D.,

PHG's Educational Consultant.

"Most are in a survival mode.

Parents have two and three jobs and not a lot of time to support the academic growth and development of their kids.

They are exhausted. The kids—they are living in dire

circumstances. Some don't even know their parents and are living with their sister, or an aunt, or their grandmother."

Particularly in lower income neighborhoods where security is an issue, there are far fewer connections among families. The struggle to find affordable housing also causes families to move more often, further cutting their children off from sources of support.

Schools have also changed, especially those in many low-income neighborhoods. They are often larger. Class size is larger. Teacher and principal turn-over is often higher. More time is spent dealing with behavioral and violence problems.

- In a recent study, one assistant principal reported that she was spending 95% of her time on 5% of the teens and that "these five percenters" were consuming all of her energy.<sup>25</sup>

The result of all these changes is that teachers are hard-pressed to provide the personal support that many students need today. Indeed, teachers report having

few options to help reach students at risk of dropping out or who are having a hard time learning.<sup>26</sup> The lack of options leads to frustration, which can lead to burnout.<sup>27</sup>

Teacher frustration, negative school environments, peer pressure to underachieve and low expectations in schools combine with the changes in families and neighborhoods to produce these enormous dropout rates in low income schools. Unfortunately, most schools have not responded.

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> This comment was made in reference to the magnitude of cohort dropout rates. The cohort dropout rate measures the percentage of 9th graders who failed to graduate with their class three years later, as opposed to a yearly dropout rate, which fails to show the full picture.
- <sup>2</sup> "Progress on Dropout Rate Stalls," Michael A. Fletcher, *The Washington Post*, March 3, 2001, page A-1.
- <sup>3</sup> A Strategic Planning Guide for the New Futures Initiative, Annie E. Casey Foundation, April 1988. Dropout Rates in the United States: 1999, National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement (NCES 2001-022). Pg. 1
- <sup>4</sup> Dropout Rates in the United States: 1999. Pg. v, p. 47.
- <sup>5</sup> Dropout Rates in the United States: 1999, Pg. 4, p. 6.
- <sup>6</sup> "Paying Now or Paying Later," Center for Effective Collaboration and Practice, 2000.
- <sup>7</sup> "Paying Now or Paying Later."
- <sup>8</sup> The Condition of Education, 1998, p. 108.
- <sup>9</sup> Planned Parenthood. Reducing Teenage Pregnancy at <http://www.plannedparenthood.org>.
- <sup>10</sup> The Condition of Education, 1998.
- <sup>11</sup> "Paying Now or Paying Later."
- <sup>12</sup> Trends in the Well-Being of America's Children and Youth, Bret Brown, published by Child Trends, Washington, D.C., December 1995.
- <sup>13</sup> Dropouts: Who Drops Out and Why—And the Recommended Action, by Robert F. Kronick and Charles H. Hargis, 1998.
- <sup>14</sup> Dropout Rates in the United States: 1999, Pg. 11, p. 51. Low income is defined as the bottom 20 percent of families' incomes for 1999. High income is the top 20 percent.
- <sup>15</sup> Dropout Rates in the United States: 1999, Pg. 12 and 13.
- <sup>16</sup> U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics, National Longitudinal Study of 1988: First Follow-up Study, 1990.
- <sup>17</sup> Planned Parenthood. Reducing Teenage Pregnancy at <http://www.plannedparenthood.org>.
- <sup>18</sup> Planned Parenthood. Reducing Teenage Pregnancy at <http://www.plannedparenthood.org>.
- <sup>19</sup> The Condition of Education 1998, National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, NCES 98-013, p 44.
- <sup>20</sup> The Condition of Education 1998, Supplemental Table 44-4.
- <sup>21</sup> The Condition of Education 1998, NCES 98-013, p 131.
- <sup>22</sup> Planned Parenthood. Reducing Teenage Pregnancy at <http://www.plannedparenthood.org>.
- <sup>23</sup> "Is Youth Violence Just Another Fact of Life?" American Psychological Association at <http://www.apa.org/ppo/violence.htm>.
- <sup>24</sup> "Is Youth Violence Just Another Fact of Life?"
- <sup>25</sup> Dropouts: Who Drops Out and Why.
- <sup>26</sup> Dropouts: Who Drops Out and Why.



# Program Design

*“Despite PHG’s accomplishments, its design is not rocket science. It embodies what is basic—the broad range of academic and personal support which intact families routinely provide their children—support which teens who drop out are often denied.”*

—Othello Poulard  
PHG Director



## THE DEMONSTRATION’S VISION

The PHG Demonstration was based on the strong conviction that it is necessary and possible to develop an affordable, easy-to-replicate approach that can help a substantial number of economically disadvantaged teenagers improve their academic and personal performance, graduate from high school and take their next step into college, a career or more training.

The Demonstration’s premise was that in order to achieve this goal, its scope must be at least as radical as the problem which it sought to remedy. With a constant infusion of academic and personal support, a **community-based, school-supported initiative** could help refuel an entire community of students who see little purpose to their education and who are slipping out of high school into life-altering events that keep them poor, in prison and vulnerable.

With a holistic educational curriculum—and the committed collaboration of existing organizations and programs—PHG’s sponsors believed they could provide low-income teens with the same type of support that intact, financially secure families and well resourced schools are routinely able to provide children. In doing so, PHG could provide a model for how to break the iron grip that poverty has on so many families.

## PHG’S GOALS AND UNIQUENESS

There are many noteworthy approaches to helping young people who are at risk of dropping out of high school: midnight basketball leagues, after-school academic tutoring by volunteers, teen pregnancy outreach,

guidance and career counseling at schools, neighborhood computer centers—the list goes on. Each of these familiar efforts has its own niche and value. However, in most cases, these approaches are dealing with only one hurdle in a course full of obstacles. Often, the assistance is short-term and not sustained enough to have the desired effect. In some situations, greater expertise and skill are necessary to address the emotional and developmental issues that prevent children from learning or being motivated to learn.

Fortunately, the increasing awareness of the inherent limitations of a single-dimension approach have begun to spawn broader collaborative efforts. Too often, however, these efforts are not reaching enough young people. Or they are not able to address multiple, underlying problems. Or they are too costly to replicate. As a result, society has made very limited gains in decreasing high school dropout rates and in truly helping disadvantaged teens escape poverty.

A recent study conducted by Johns Hopkins University's Center for Research on Effective Schooling for Disadvantaged Students found:

“In our examination of strategies and programs [responding to the challenge of educating poor children and children of color], we have consistently observed two troubling, if not new phenomena. The first is commonly known as the ‘fade-out’ effect. Too often students participate in a particular program and make significant academic and/or behavioral improvements, only to have these gains drop off when they are promoted out of the program or move to another school.

“The second observation is that **individual programs often address only one source of a student’s difficulties....**Such programs may have positive benefits that extend beyond their stated purposes....**Few programs, however, explicitly address the student as a whole person with a variety of complex needs and experiences, all of which have some impact, positive or negative, on her or his ability to learn.**”<sup>1</sup> (Emphasis added.)

The PHG Demonstration utilized such a holistic approach, an approach that would:

- Be at least as radical as the problem it attempts to solve.
- Focus on all the students in a neighborhood in order to reach more young people and enhance replicability.
- Provide one-on-one, daily positive adult reinforcement which paralleled parenting to help students get to a place where they can learn.
- Strengthen relationships between schools and homes, students and their parents, students and their communities, and neighborhoods and human service providers.
- Identify the layers of needs that young, low-income teens have and meet these needs in ways that develop the whole person—academically and personally.
- Develop very broad-based collaborations with organizations that could combine their services and activities in a way that would provide the holistic assistance needed.
- Create an affordable, community-based educational model replicable by schools.

## PHG'S START-UP

- Endorsements and Funding
- Core Staffing
- Neighborhood-Based Student Centers (or School)
- Linking or Integrating PHG to Schools
- Community Participation
- Mighty Moms and Pops
- Student Participation

## ENDORSEMENTS AND FUNDING

During 1995-1996, the Center for Community Change (CCC) initiated a series of meetings with prospective collaborating organizations and former HUD Secretary Henry Cisneros to thoroughly examine the merit and possibility of launching the PHG Demonstration.

“PHG was about working with the whole child. It was about providing a counterbalance to an environment that sends low income young people the message that they can’t succeed. We as educators need more time with these children. If we want them to succeed, we need to do anything and everything to help them. PHG didn’t leave these kids alone for one moment.”

—Elizabeth Smith, Ph.D.,  
PHG Educational Liaison

Because the groups’ consensus was that the proposed model contained breadth and depth that rivaled the severity of the problem which it sought to tackle, and because it had the enthusiastic support of prominent and relevant collaborators, Secretary Cisneros agreed to provide the bulk of funds needed to launch the Demonstration.

“Very low-income young teens are in dire need of alternative educational models. What makes PHG an exciting model is that it meets kids where they are, and that’s the only way that a person’s education can happen.”

—Hugh Price, President,  
National Urban League

In May 1997, HUD awarded CCC a demonstration grant to further refine and test the PHG model in five public housing developments in Washington, D.C. Judge Iralene Barnes, Vice President of the Potomac Electric Power Company (PEPCO), convinced PEPCO to provide seed funds to help with planning and start-up costs.

## STAFFING

PHG was launched and operated with a lean core staff, a handful of consultants with significant expertise, and a battery of neighborhood-based teams. Core staff included a Director and Assistant, based centrally, who managed the project and worked with three full-time start-up staff to locate resources,

### Who Collaborated?

#### Original Endorsers

National Council of Negro Women  
National Urban League  
Potomac Electric Power Company (PEPCO)  
Anne E. Casey Foundation  
University of District of Columbia  
District of Columbia Housing Authority

attract collaborators and develop the program.

When PHG was launched, start-up staff evolved into Site Coordinators, responsible for building and then managing on-site teams and activities. Each of the neighborhood-based, on-site teams included the Site Coordinator, Mighty Moms and Pops, academic tutor coordinators, tutors, mentors and a case manager.

### NEIGHBORHOOD-BASED STUDENT CENTERS

The District of Columbia Housing Authority, which provides housing for over 26,000 low-income individuals, agreed to become PHG’s test site. As a troubled housing authority, in both financial and physical distress, it was being managed by David Gilmore, who had been appointed by the court as a receiver.

In close consultation with the housing authority, PHG’s director selected five

housing developments in different parts of Washington, D.C.

In each of these five developments, the housing authority provided space for PHG study centers at no cost. Approximately a dozen AmeriCorps volunteers, as well as residents in the community and housing authority employees, completed the design and necessary physical improvements to each of the five centers.

### LINKING PHG CENTERS TO THE SCHOOLS

After selecting the sites, the Director and educational consultants met with principals and administrative staff at all of the junior and senior high schools for the five neighborhoods targeted. These meetings introduced school staff to the PHG Demonstration’s goals, solicited their collaboration, and laid the foundation for establishing the systems necessary for PHG to monitor student academic progress and help them advance.

PHG Centers Based in 5 Neighborhoods for 13 Schools			
Development	Number of Apartments	Number of 8th-12th graders	Schools enrolled in PHG
Barry Farms	432	87	Ballou High Coolidge High
Elvans Road	20	13	Hart Junior Douglas Junior Ballou Senior
James Creek	188	41	Jefferson Junior Wilson Senior Dunbar Senior
Kelly Miller	293	29	Banneker Junior Garrett Junior Cardoza Senior
Langston	274	27	Brown Junior Spingard Senior

Dr. Elizabeth Smith, a former Assistant Superintendent in Washington, D.C. public schools, an educational consultant for the Demonstration, spoke with school officials about why schools needed PHG. As a colleague she could address the fears and skepticism that a new approach inevitably engenders.

As a result of these meetings, each of the 13 schools that PHG students attended designated point people to help PHG obtain and track basic information about each student. Once the school year started, PHG staff also began to develop relationships with teachers, guidance counselors, administrative staff, vocational counselors and other personnel to identify students' ongoing needs and begin to rebuild relationships between parents and schools.

## COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

After neighborhood space was committed, key early collaborators in the PHG process were the Resident Councils in each of the developments. As leaders elected by residents in their development, the Councils were essential in facilitating contact between PHG and families in the community.

Developing direct relationships with Resident Councils during the planning phase, rather than relying on the housing authority to act as a go-between, enabled PHG to establish a direct line to leaders who were known in the community, who were organizing, and who were familiar with families and their needs.

This support was important in different ways. Resident Councils assisted PHG staff

with community-wide outreach necessary to launch PHG. They reassured families—who are continually forced to participate in “new” programs—about the benefits of PHG. They provided mailing lists so PHG could send registration forms and flyers to every family in the development. And they provided input into the rehabilitation and design of PHG study centers.

“If we as residents don’t push for better education for our kids, they will be left behind. We need programs that are not quick hits and misses. And we need programs that involve us, the community, because if these programs are imposed on a neighborhood, they will be an abysmal failure.”

—Ed Williams, President,  
Public Housing Residents National  
Organizing Campaign

In turn, the PHG Demonstration provided the Resident Councils with a program for young people in their community, young people whom they were worried about, in some cases were afraid of, and in many cases not connected to.



*AmeriCorp volunteer fixing up a PHG study center.*

## MIGHTY MOMS AND POPS

To deepen the level of community participation and develop an effective community-based infrastructure, PHG recruited, screened, hired and trained eight residents from the five developments to become

Mighty Moms and Mighty Pops.

“We lived in the developments. We were here with the kids. We knew what they wanted, what they didn’t want, and what they needed.”

—*Mighty Mom Jacqui Brown*

Mighty Moms and Pops served as key liaisons between the program operations and the households of the participating students. They were like second moms

and pops—the adults who were there every day watching, supervising, guiding, listening to and caring about the kids.

“They were there all the time,” said site coordinator Ruqaiyah Smith. “They were the ones who went out and found kids on the corner when they didn’t show up for PHG.”

Because Mighty Moms and Pops lived in the developments, they knew a lot about their neighborhoods and were familiar with residents. Parents and young people in the community felt comfortable speaking with them. They were not seen as outsiders just trying to help poor kids. They were members of the community.

“My Mighty Mom, she would be at the center all the time, even when other people weren’t there. And we could talk to her about anything. We could call her on the phone, her home phone. She would always be there.”

—*Taneka Veasley, PHG Graduate*

Initially, Mighty Moms helped recruit and enroll students in PHG. After the pilot was launched, Mighty Moms were stationed at PHG centers early in the afternoon to be there when students got out of school. They wore many hats. They:

- Helped facilitate communication among the students, their families, the schools and PHG collaborators.
- Provided emotional support and positive reinforcement to the students.
- Met with students’ families and made regular “house calls.”
- Worked with PHG staff and volunteers to coordinate PHG activities.
- Helped to maintain records for each student.

Preparing Mighty Moms for their multi-hat role was coordinated by Alethia Spraggins, a former administrator and veteran teacher for 30 years in the D.C. public school system. She worked with PHG to train Mighty Moms about what to expect, how to motivate and set boundaries for the students, and how to interface with schools, teachers and guidance counselors.

“Some kids have never had boundaries at home. Others had behavioral problems. Their guidance counselors have caseloads of 300-400 students. It takes a lot of training and skill to work with many of these students.”

—*Alethia Spraggins, Ph.D.*

To provide Mighty Moms and Pops with additional credentials, PHG negotiated their enrollment in VISTA, and they became VISTA-certified.

## STUDENT PARTICIPATION

In May 1997, five months prior to the new school year, PHG staff launched its first registration drive in the five public housing developments.

The challenge to reach and motivate the 9th-12th grade students in these neighborhoods to enroll in PHG was immense. Many of their families, schools and communities were rife with dysfunction and expressed only a modest appreciation for academics. Studying and graduating were not a high priority for many of them. In some cases, mere survival was the priority.

Working with the housing authority and local schools, PHG staff identified all 8th-12th grade students in the five developments. Regardless of circumstance or grade point average, PHG wanted every student and tried to make it impossible for any kid to say “no” to PHG. With this goal, PHG

decided to build into its budget a modest—yet meaningful—work study allowance for fully participating students (see box below for more details).

“We need to do whatever it takes to get kids in the door, to get them motivated, and to keep them hanging in there. And that’s what PHG’s work study allowance did.”

—Alethia Spraggins, Ph.D.  
PHG Educational Consultant

Collaborating with Resident Councils in each of the developments, PHG staff convened community orientation meetings and open houses to inform families about the benefits of PHG. Flyers announcing the Demonstration were sent to every home. PHG staff then held registration sessions within each of the five study centers. And to bring the hard-to-reach kids into PHG, staff went door-to-door to meet with families and register slow-to-respond students.

### Work Study Allowances

With modest financial assistance, teens are far less likely to seek money through other means—be it a job which might force them to drop out of school or illegal activities which could lead to arrest and incarceration. As an incentive to enroll and stay enrolled in PHG, PHG provided all students with a modest work study allowance. Twelfth graders received \$200/month. All other students received \$100/month. To receive the work study allowance, students had to fulfill the following requirements:

- 5 hours/week of after-school academic assistance
- 1 hour/week life skills workshop or seminar
- 10 hours/month community involvement
- 2 Saturday sessions per month for 11th and 12th graders on college and career preparation
- 4-6 weeks Youth Court training
- 4-6 weeks public speaking and leadership training

In addition to providing an incentive to participate, the allowance gave PHG a vehicle to teach students about financial management: how to budget their earnings, how to establish and balance a bank account, and how to manage credit. Many students were able to save money for college for books and other expenses.

#### Who Collaborated?

##### Student Accounts

**Nations Bank:** Opened checking accounts for PHG students’ study allowances.

**D.C. Consumer Credit Counseling:** Taught students budget management strategies.

## A HOLISTIC APPROACH: PHG'S COMPONENTS

- Positive Adult Reinforcement
- Daily Academic Tutoring
- Mentoring
- Strategic Links with Key Collaborators
- One-on-One Personal and Academic Support
- Cultural Enrichment
- Meaningful Work Study Allowance
- Health Care
- College and Career Readiness
- Personal Computers
- Life Skills, Health and Leadership Training
- Public Speaking
- Youth Court
- Computer Literacy
- Recreational Activities
- Financial Aid
- Community Involvement
- Parent Involvement

## ONE-ON-ONE SUPPORT

PHG's guiding principle was to provide all its students with the full range of academic and personal support they needed. Essential to achieving this was weaving one-on-one support into every part of the Demonstration's program.

To provide students with sustained, individualized academic and personal assistance, PHG brought together a cadre of adults to work at each center. This cadre included academic tutors, Mighty Moms, site coordinators and mentors. The goal was to increase the percent of time that kids interacted with supportive adults.

"What was invaluable about PHG — which the schools could not match — was that between the Mighty Moms and the academic tutors, kids were going to get the one-on-one that they needed."

—Alethia Spraggins, Ph.D.,  
PHG Educational Consultant

"The tutors and Mighty Moms were really there for us. They would come pick us up at school. They would check on us at school. They would call guidance counselors. If we needed anything, they would come to the school building and have a one-on-one with teachers. It was like having a second mom."

—Taneka Veasley, PHG Graduate

## DAILY ACADEMIC TUTORING

The core component of PHG was academic tutoring. Tutoring was available primarily on Monday through Thursday at every PHG center from 3–7 p.m. Students were encouraged to set appointments with



tutors at additional times when they needed special help. A pool of tutors was on-call on Saturdays between 10–12 a.m. All students were expected to receive academic tutoring at least six hours per week.

For the five developments, PHG had between 30–35 tutors, or one tutor to every 8-10 students. In many cases, tutors helped students with their homework. A tutor coordinator in each site provided the overall supervision, including a curriculum for tutors to follow (many of the schools did not provide the students with books in or out of class). Often students were not given any homework or assignments. Many were not being taught the fundamentals of major subjects such as math, English and science.

To establish a curriculum for PHG tutors, the Tutor Coordinators had to visit students' schools and obtain relevant information about the teachers' instructional goals. Students' needs, the schools' deficiencies and PHG's goals required that the Demonstration hire professional teachers, retired teachers and university students.

To tailor assistance to the individual needs of students, each 11th and 12th grade PHG student completed an Academic Service Assessment to evaluate academic strengths and weaknesses. They also filled in a Learning and Study Strategies Inventory designed to find out how the student learns and studies. Based on these evaluations, PHG worked with students to put together their own Academic Plans, which PHG staff used to evaluate progress and set goals.

"[PHG] had all kinds of tutors majoring in different subjects, so we weren't lacking anything," says Taneka Veasley, a PHG graduate. "If we had a problem with sci-

ence, history, math, somebody was always there to help us, no matter what."

Tutors also taught PHG students how to study. Homework assignments became the learning experience.

"I had a problem with studying skills," says Veasley. "In one ear and go out the other. But I'd go to the PHG center and they would help me. They taught me how to take your time to study. Do a couple of pages a day. Let it stick to your brain. I have to read slowly because I have to let it sink in. PHG taught me how to have good studying skills."

The Demonstration's goals also required tutors who knew and understood the challenges that PHG students faced. In some cases, tutors had grown up in public housing. In other cases, tutors had experience teaching students who needed extra help and motivation.

With the assistance of participating school teachers and guidance counselors, PHG closely monitored the academic

### Who Collaborated?

#### Academic Tutoring

Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc

AmeriCorps

Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.

District of Columbia Pan-Hellenic Council

Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc.

Howard University students

University of the District of Columbia students

University of Maryland students

"Tutors who were the most successful were those who had a desire to bond with the students. When they bonded, students wanted to be with them."

—*Ruqaiyah Smith,*  
*PHG Site Coordinator*

"My tutor, he would help me out a lot. I wasn't very good in math. But I did good because we had one-on-one tutoring. They [PHG tutors] would take time aside to help us individually."

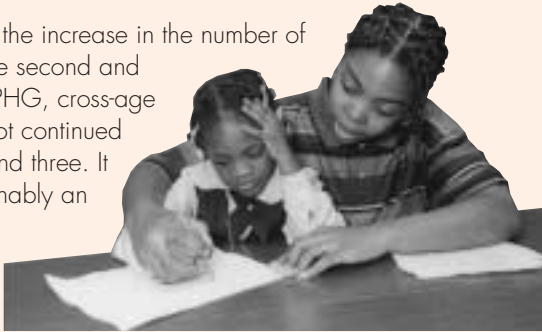
—*Taneka Veasley, PHG Graduate*

## Cross-Age Tutoring

In PHG's first year, the curriculum included a cross-age tutoring component, in which upper grade PHG students tutored first through third graders in their neighborhoods. The purpose of this experience was to raise PHG students' skills and self-esteem and also provide needed academic assistance to younger, elementary-level students. Tutors worked with PHG students, teaching them how to teach.

The cross-age tutoring challenged PHG students to grow academically. It reinforced a positive learning environment and became uplifting to the entire neighborhood because little kids would go home excited about what they were learning and talk about it.

Because of the increase in the number of activities for the second and third years of PHG, cross-age tutoring was not continued in years two and three. It was unquestionably an effective and worthwhile component.



progress of each student and intervened as necessary. Materials that PHG collected from each school for each student included:

- Report Cards
- Results of Assessment Tests
- School Attendance Records
- School Transcripts
- Mid-Period Reports
- Disciplinary Reports

PHG staff also kept close tabs on students personally and bridged the home-school gap. In some cases, PHG staff met bi-weekly with school personnel to get updates on youth at-risk of not graduating or advancing to the next grade. What PHG found was that once students became en-

gaged, they really wanted to know where they stood.

Home visits were also used to counsel 11th and 12th graders one-on-one who were experiencing personal or emotional problems and having trouble staying in school. For those at risk of not graduating, staff made weekly visits.

## Alternative PHG Schedule

As PHG evolved, to maintain student participation, staff had to structure the program to accommodate 10–20 students who could not participate in all the required activities because they had to work or participate in sports or other approved activities. To accommodate these students, PHG established an alternative schedule with students who agreed to certain responsibilities. This alternative schedule proved to be a necessary refinement.

Students allowed to participate in the Alternative PHG Schedule were required to:

1. Keep a daily journal with:
  - Overall feelings of the day.
  - At least two lessons learned that day.
  - At least one mistake made.
  - Ways the mistake was or will be corrected.
  - Summary of school assignments completed.
  - Summary of homework that day.
  - Summary of tests given and grades received.
2. Submit a one-page report each week to the PHG Demonstration Site Coordina-

tor summarizing the previous week's journal entries.

3. Submit a one-page school progress report each week to the PHG Demonstration Site Coordinator.
4. Assist a Mighty Mom with coordination of community service events.
5. Attend, once a month (as opposed to two times a month), a 3-hour Saturday PHG-sponsored workshop or training.

## MENTORING

To further increase the level of emotional support, PHG developed a strong Sister-to-Sister, Brother-to-Brother mentoring component.

For 2–3 hours each week, Big Brothers and Big Sisters would meet with their group of PHG students. Students were placed in cluster groups of 10–15 students by gender and age.

The experience was structured to be both non-threatening and interactive. It was down time: time during which students would do planned activities or something spontaneous. Activities which students frequently elected to do included hair styling, cooking (and eating), competitive games and rap sessions on whatever they wanted to talk about.

Over time, genuine bonds grew among the students and between PHG students and their Big Brother or Big Sister. For many, these sessions helped to compensate for lack of affirmation and support at home and taught them the value of developing these types of relationships as they moved on and out of PHG.

“Sisterhood is very important because you always have somebody, not only in your family, but outside of your family. You have someone to talk to when there’s no one there. I plan on joining a sorority when I go to college. When you are in college, you’re by yourself most of the time. So when you join a sorority, it’s like you have another family.”

—Taneka Veasley, PHG Graduate

These relationships enabled many students to acknowledge their need for help with very private and deep feelings related to school, family, sex, insecurities and other problems. Once they opened up, PHG could then offer more relevant and effective assistance.



In addition to the efforts of Big Brothers and Big Sisters, Site Coordinators, Mighty Moms and tutors also mentored.

They searched for kids' interests and used these interests to challenge them to explore beyond the

### Who Collaborated?

#### Building an Extended Family

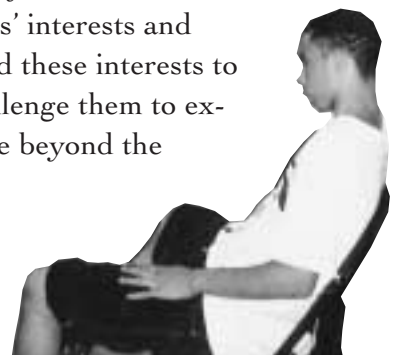
**AmeriCorps/VISTA:** Provided stipends for local residents to be Mighty Moms and Pops.

**D.C. Public Housing Authority and Resident Councils:** Helped recruit residents to be Mighty Moms.

**Metro Teens Aids:** Brother-to-Brother/Sister-to-Sister

**Iota Phi Theta Fraternity, Inc.:** Mentoring and Brother-to-Brother

**CCC Staff Volunteers with Beverly Jackson:** Ran a Sister-to-Sister group.



“I remember one time we went to go see a basketball game. I don’t like sports. But it was fun knowing that everybody was there and we were just having fun.”

—Teresa Davis, PHG Graduate

negativity around them. They worked to raise self-esteem and recondition anti-school, anti-everything mindsets. They provided basic emotional support, dealt with basic core values such as

respect, truth and responsibility, and modeled how to handle conflict. The key through it all was continuous reinforcement and living by example.

PHG also integrated a recreational and community service component into its mentoring program. Recreational activities were structured to give students physical and social activity, such as basketball games and attending professional sports events. They helped students bond with one another and simply have fun.

PHG also helped release the stress, both academic and personal, by doing new and, in some cases, very ordinary activities.

“Our Mighty Mom would take us places on trips or to the mall for something. She let us have fun or loosen up so you wouldn’t be all about stress all the time.”

—Taneka Veasley, PHG Graduate

Each PHG site also developed its own community service activities to involve students in improving their neighborhoods and helping others in need. The goal was to build a sense of civic responsibility and a positive connection to one’s community. Such activities included:

- Working at a local food bank

- Gardening
- Community clean-up days

“Once a week I took kids to an elderly development and the kids did things for people. They went to the store for them. They cleaned up for them. Whatever needed to be done, they did.”

—Mighty Mom Charlotte Brown

## LIFE SKILLS, HEALTH AND LEADERSHIP TRAINING

To facilitate students’ capacity to focus on their studies, it was necessary to deal with serious problems in their lives—peer pressure, violence, drugs, lack of parental support, teen pregnancy, alcoholism in their families, financial worries and stress, sickness in their families. And, to help students build the skills they needed to deal with tough issues, make good life decisions and stay away from trouble, PHG collaborated with numerous organizations—each with its own expertise and specialty.

At all five PHG centers, human service groups, health care providers, leadership organizations, counseling specialists and youth groups conducted weekly workshops and seminars on issues relevant to students’ lives. PHG’s goal was to provide students with a regular infusion of information and support that they weren’t getting any place else.

Topics for workshops and seminars included:

- Academic and Career Options
- Resisting peer pressure

- Teen pregnancy
- Empowerment and self-esteem
- Conflict resolution
- Sex education
- Public Speaking
- Violence prevention
- Nutrition
- Physical fitness
- Substance abuse prevention
- Rape crisis counseling
- Money Management

“We had sessions about drugs, about sex, about everything. And it helped me out a lot at school because people used to be in fights over stupid stuff, boyfriends and stuff like that. I always had fights. I was always negative. I’d say what I feel. But it’s not worth it because people probably just want to fight you. PHG taught me how to walk away from it. So now I just walk away. I don’t have time to get beat up or killed over something stupid.”

—Teresa Davis, PHG Graduate

## PUBLIC SPEAKING

At each development, PHG students also went through a 6–8 week training on public speaking. The goal was to build their confidence and develop better listening and speaking skills. Toastmasters, Inc. was the collaborating organization that conducted trainings for three years.

“PHG made kids think differently about themselves,” says Mighty Mom Jacqui

### Who Collaborated?

#### Life Skills, Health and Leadership

**Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.** Life Skills

**Ala-Teen:** Teenagers trained by Al-Anon shared insights on ways to cope with stresses involving family or friends who are alcoholics or recovering alcoholics.

**Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.:** Held health fairs and follow-up health services open to the entire community, providing information about health issues, especially issues affecting minority communities, such as high blood pressure and AIDS.

**D.C. Rape Crisis Center:** Self-defense and protection strategies.

**D.C. Superior Court, Judge Hamilton:** Youth Court collaboration.

**International Women’s Center for Democracy and Fit Physique:** Training to be physical fitness specialists.

**NE Place:** Life skills development.

**Planned Parenthood of Greater DC:** Teen pregnancy prevention and sex education workshops.

**Sasha Bruce Youth Program:** Drug and alcohol education.

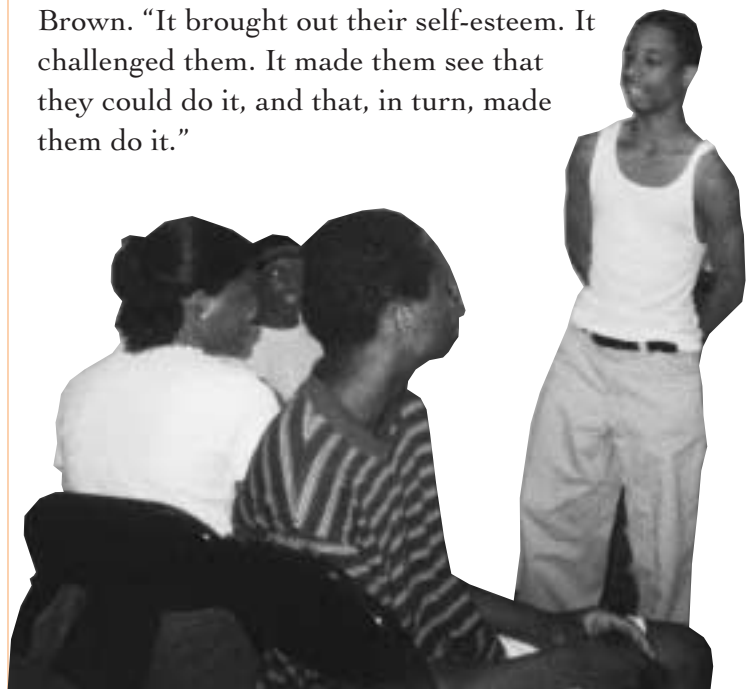
**Teens Against the Spread of HIV/AIDS:** HIV/AIDS education.

**Time Dollar Institute:** Trained PHG students to serve on Youth Court juries for cases involving first-time, non-violent youth offenders.

**Toastmasters, Inc.:** Public speaking and listening skills.

**Youth Leadership:** Training in self-esteem and public-speaking skills.

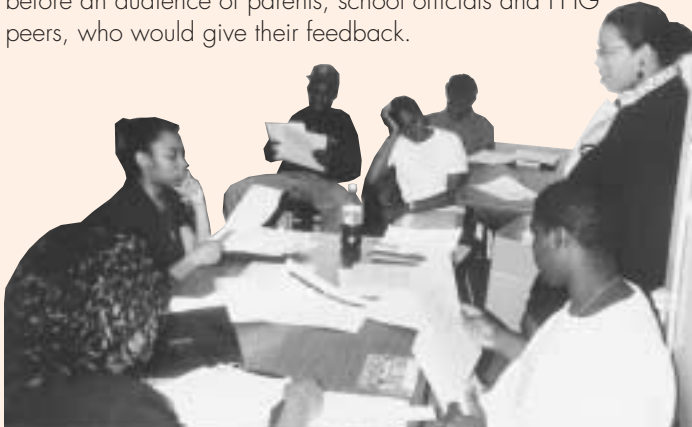
Brown. “It brought out their self-esteem. It challenged them. It made them see that they could do it, and that, in turn, made them do it.”



## Writing and Speaking

One of the biggest challenges that all students face is learning how to write. PHG wove writing sessions throughout its curriculum. Tutors, Mighty Moms, Site Coordinators and mentors all made it safe for and challenged students to write.

In collaboration with Toastmasters, Inc., a hundred-year-old international organization with local chapters throughout the country, writing was often linked to public speaking activities. PHG held special events, which in themselves were learning experiences, with PHG students practicing their public speaking before an audience of parents, school officials and PHG peers, who would give their feedback.



## YOUTH COURT

PHG collaborated with a Youth Court operating out of the D.C. Superior Court. Designed by the Time Dollar Institute, this is a court in which teens who are arrested for the first time for non-violent offenses are put on trial and, if found guilty, are given sentences by a jury of their teen peers. Teen juries ask questions about the factors surrounding the youth's arrest, assess the evidence, reach a verdict, then fashion a sentence designed to help that young person avoid being arrested again.

PHG's goal in collaborating with the Time Dollar Institute was to discourage students from unlawful behavior and to teach them problem-solving skills. Staff attorneys at Time Dollar Institute developed an inno-

vative 8-week curriculum to train PHG students to become jurists. The training curriculum included understanding the elements of offenses, moral issues, responsibility and personal growth.

## COMPUTER LITERACY

PHG's academic curriculum included developing its students' computer literacy—a virtual must in the current working world. This component was called PHG.com (“com” stood for Computer Owners Module).

To bridge the digital divide between low-income students and students in families that have computers—and to make this aspect of the curriculum meaningful—PHG collaborated with JobBOSS Software, a private for-profit software company. This partner helped to insure that each participating student received a free home computer and that each PHG center was outfitted with a computer lab.

A team of 10 employees at JobBOSS developed and implemented a plan to target their customer base for computer donations. In return for donating a computer to PHG (which was sponsored by a nonprofit that could receive tax-deductible contributions), businesses and individuals donating computers would receive a tax deduction. JobBOSS also offered an extra incentive of \$100–\$300 off certain purchases. The U.S. Department of Agriculture also donated dozens of computers and printers.

“Having a computer really helped me out a lot in U.S. History and English, especially English. We had a

lot of research papers to do and we had to type them up. I didn't have to go to the library to type up my papers, I always could do it at home. I didn't have to depend on anybody else to do it for me."

—Teresa Davis, PHG Graduate.

With further collaboration from the Black Data Processing Association, a computer training and repair business, PHG set up computer labs in its five study centers with 7–12 state-of-the-art computers with Internet access.

Three days a week, PHG scheduled 2-hour sessions at each site to instruct stu-



dents in how to operate and troubleshoot computers.

## CULTURAL EDUCATION

PHG's significant cultural educational component was designed and coordinated by part-time consultant Caroline Ross Wilson, a recently retired principal of the Duke Ellington School for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C. This component exposed students to a wide range of arts.

Ms. Wilson established a productive relationship with the arts communities in the Washington metropolitan area which, among many other benefits, provided the students with free tickets to numerous performances at the Kennedy Center, the Washington Symphony Orchestra, Constitution Hall and the United States Air Force Band.

Through PHG-sponsored performances, students could experience concert halls and facilities that most of them had never seen, such as the National Cathedral, Constitution Hall and the newly restored Lincoln Theater. They were also exposed to different cultures, literature and young artists.

## COMMUNITY ARTS OUTREACH

In collaboration with the Kennedy

### Who Collaborated?

#### Computers

**Black Data Processing Association:** Provided PHG students with computer training and repair.

**JobBOSS Software, Inc.** Arranged to have 75 computers donated by its customers and staff.

**U.S. Department of Agriculture:** Donated computers and printers.

### Who Collaborated?

#### The Arts

Kennedy Center's Community Partnership Outreach Program

Washington Symphony Orchestra

United States Air Force Band

Center's Community Outreach Program, PHG students received tickets to a wide range of performances including:

- Music and the Underground Railroad: The Life of Harriet Tubman
- Panorama Latino in Honor of Cinco de Mayo: Latino Dance Company Maru Montero
- And Then They Came for Me: Remembering the World of Anne Frank
- Awele Makeba: Story Teller of Ancient African Folklore
- My Lord What a Morning: The Marion Anderson Story
- Street Sounds: AccePELLa, Jazz, Rhythm and Blues
- Color of Justice: A Black History/Civil Rights Performance

## COLLEGE AND CAREER PREPARATION

To increase the students' interest and ability to go beyond high school, PHG developed the *College or Career, Next Year* component. This component focused on 11th and 12th grade students.

In collaboration with the Talent Search Program at the University of the District of Columbia, (funded by the U.S. Department of Education), PHG students were introduced to educational, career and financial aid opportunities available after high school. *College or Career, Next Year* convened every other Saturday at



different local college campuses, introducing PHG students to these environments, which were worlds unknown for most of them. Lunch was always provided.

To help PHG students think about and ready themselves to take their next step, *College or Career, Next Year* provided an infusion of motivation, support and guidance. Every 11th and 12th grader was also assisted in completing college applications and financial aid requests.

The Director of Financial Aid at the University of the District of Columbia conducted financial aid workshops to help parents and students get through the maze of grants, loans and work study options available. In addition, PHG invited the Directors of Admission of open-admission colleges to speak. These directors came with application forms, helped the students complete them that day, then brought the completed forms back to their colleges, thus registering these students immediately. PHG also helped students overcome their fear of college.

"They would take us on field trips to different colleges. We would learn about how to do a real interview. They gave us practice interviews. They gave us practice tests. They would help us study throughout the week and during the weekends. PHG would buy us lunch and take us out to the library and we would do research papers with all the different people in the library who have colleges and careers. It was very good."

— Taneka Veasley, PHG Graduate

Home visits were also a critical part of PHG's *College or Career, Next Year* com-

ponent. In many instances, PHG staff would find it difficult to obtain vital information from the parents needed for college enrollment and financial aid documentation. PHG staff made home visits to help students gather this information.

D.C. Public Schools also collaborated with PHG on a range of college-readiness initiatives, including preparation for college entrance exams, visits to area colleges for early orientation sessions, and identifying and negotiating scholarships and other support.

Saturday sessions also addressed the needs of students who did not want to go to college and were interested in occupations which did not require formal training. Students were encouraged to think critically about their choices. For example, one exercise required students to pick an occupation, look through the newspaper for jobs, apartments for rent and cars, and then estimate these living expenses per month and per year. Exercises like this were eye-openers for PHG students.

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Family life has a tremendous impact on academic performance. And parent involvement, especially of students at risk of not graduating, is one of the toughest challenges that schools face.

PHG had to be prepared to deal with many family dynamics. In some situations, parents were working night and day jobs, and families felt the stress of being on the edge financially. In other homes, there were serious issues of violence, substance abuse and neglect. Some parents lacked basic lit-

eracy or parenting skills. Others were in poor health. And some, by their own example, reinforced negative behavior.

From the beginning, PHG staff reached out to students' families to introduce parents and guardians to its mission.

Once PHG was launched, staff began to develop regular and routine paths of communication into families to provide support, deal with difficult issues and close the gap between home and schools. Through weekly phone calls, home visits and monthly parent meetings at each PHG

### Who Collaborated?

#### Beyond High School

**Talent Search:** Coordinated PHG's *College and Career, Next Year* sessions.

**Howard University, Georgetown University:** Provided space for Saturday *College or Career, Next Year* sessions.

**University of the District of Columbia:** Conducted financial aid workshops and provided space for Saturday sessions.

Volunteer Speakers for Career Orientation from Numerous Fields:

- U.S. Army, Navy and Air Force
- DC Police Department
- Professional Athletes
- Radio Personalities
- Culinary Arts



*Many parents and Mighty Moms also learned to use computers.*

“PHG gave parents a chance, too.”

—*Taneka Veasley,*  
*PHG Graduate*

“Once parents became more involved in their kids’ lives and education, their kids became more respectful.”

—*Ruqaiyah Smith,*  
*PHG Site Coordinator*

site, PHG staff worked to build relationships and get parents more active in their children’s education and development.

As PHG staff helped parents and kids communicate, in some cases they had to become the students’ advocate.

In others, they had to be a supportive ear for parents feeling overwhelmed and underappreciated.

As relationships between parents and PHG evolved, many parents became in-

involved. Some worked at PHG centers helping Mighty Moms set up activities. Others, with the help of PHG, received financial aid to go to school and participated in computer trainings at the PHG center to develop their own skills.

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Education Reforms and Students at Risk: A Review of the Current State of the Art, Section II: Rising to the Challenge: Emerging Strategies for Educating Students At Risk by Nettie Letgers, Edward McDill, and James McPartland, Center for Research on Effective Schooling for Disadvantaged Students, Johns Hopkins University, January 1994.

## Getting Beyond High School

The University of the District of Columbia’s Talent Search Program introduced PHG students to educational, career and financial aid opportunities available beyond high school. *College or Career, Next Year* provided:

### ■ Career Counseling

- Information about specific careers
- Training and skills necessary
- Career interest evaluation
- One-on-one follow-up and planning
- Resume preparation
- Interview techniques for employment
- Field trips to businesses

### ■ Education Counseling

- Study skills and test-taking techniques
- Pre-college curriculum requirements
- Individualized educational planning
- College entrance requirements

- College entrance SAT exam preparation
- Interview techniques for college entrance
- Field trips to colleges and universities

### ■ Financial Aid Counseling

- Financial aid workshops for students and parents
- Technical assistance with financial aid forms

### ■ Personal Counseling

- Goal-setting workshops
- Motivational and self-esteem seminars
- Mentoring



# Impact

*“I saw young people mature. I saw at least a few families learn how to motivate their children. I saw children become more respectful and I saw their lives and their families change.”*

—Ruqaiyah K. Smith  
PHG Site Coordinator

The goal of the PHG Demonstration was to test an approach which has the potential to substantially reduce the dropout rate of young teens in low-income families and under-resourced schools and neighborhoods.

To determine how well PHG met its potential, the Naiker and King Group evaluated the program after its initial year.<sup>1</sup> The evaluation examined the records of each PHG student as well as a database of 917 students attending the same schools. It also compared the records of a random sample of 50 PHG students with a random sample of 50 non-PHG students. The evaluation surveyed the students and interviewed on-site staff and volunteers.

In the subsequent two years, detailed records were kept for all participating students.

What follows are key results of the PHG pilot.

## PARTICIPATION

PHG’s initial goal was to register every 8th-12th grader in the five targeted develop-

*Teresa Davis surrounded by her family at her graduation from Coolidge High School in June 2000. With an interest in nursing, she was accepted at Norfolk State University. She participated in PHG for three years.*



“I lost three kids temporarily, and that was because their grades had dropped. The parents thought that it was our program that was the problem, so they took them out. But then they saw that it wasn’t the program that was bringing the kids’ grades down. So the kids came back and then they started getting Bs.”

—Mighty Mom Jacqui Brown

ments. It did not favor the students with the most potential for success; it wanted everyone, just as the public school system must register all eligible students.

As a result of intense, community-based, door-to-door outreach, PHG achieved nearly 100% enrollment: 176 of 187 8th–12th

grade students known to be living at the developments participated in PHG’s first year. Of these 176 students, 88% stayed in school or graduated, according to the evaluation.

According to PHG site coordinators, Mighty Moms and PHG students, the work-study cash allowance proved to be an effective incentive for participation. Several students acknowledged that the computer which each participant was given was also an incentive to enroll and participate.

But over time, both staff and students reported that the genuine bonds which formed between them, coupled with the academic and personal support, led the students to continue participating because they wanted to.

“It was a relief to know I wasn’t alone. If I had a problem or something was difficult, my tutor or Ms. Ruqaiyah [Site Coordinator] would help me through it, whether it was personal or academic. With PHG there, I didn’t have to do it alone.”

—Taneka Veasley, PHG Graduate

As the word spread about the PHG Demonstration, teens who lived in surrounding neighborhoods also wanted to participate.

“People wanted to join PHG but they couldn’t because they didn’t live within the demonstration sites. But they wanted to participate because they saw that we weren’t hanging out on the streets. They saw we were going to different activities during the week. It [PHG] kept us off the street.”

—Taneka Veasley, PHG Graduate

## ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENTS

Student academic advancement was PHG’s ultimate goal. To assess students’ progress, the evaluation compared PHG student performance to non-PHG student performance. The non-PHG students were in public schools in areas where PHG was sited.

A number of standard academic barometers were used to evaluate PHG’s impact, including grades, graduation rates, dropout rates, attendance and Stanford Nine scores. With each academic indicator, PHG students performed better than their non-PHG cohorts.

### Higher Grade Point Average

PHG students’ cumulative Grade Point Average (GPA) exceeded the cumulative GPA of non-PHG participants by .65—more than a half a grade point higher. On a 4.0 scale, a .65 increase is very significant.

Many PHG students did very well: 26% graduated with a GPA of 3.0 or higher (see table on page 40).

## Highlights: Key Results of the PHG Demonstration

### Participation in the PHG Demonstration

- Virtually every 8th-12th grader in the five public housing developments targeted enrolled in PHG. (176 of 187 in its first year).
- Only one PHG teen (a 10th grader) dropped out of her high school because of pregnancy.
- PHG Demonstration students had a substantially higher school attendance and lower truancy rate than non-PHG Demonstration counterparts.

### Academic Achievement

- 89.6% of the PHG Demonstration students who reached 12th grade graduated.
- 26% of PHG's seniors graduated with a grade point average of 3.0 or above.
- Overall, PHG students had a significantly higher grade point average than non-PHG students.
- Only one 12th grader failed to graduate because of incarceration.

- Not one 12th grader failed to graduate because she was pregnant.

### Beyond Graduation

- 70% of PHG graduates applied to college or trade school.
- 100% of these students were accepted into colleges and trade schools.
- 100% of the students accepted into college who completed financial aid forms received at least \$4,100 in financial aid.

### Community and Family Impact

- The Demonstration created five neighborhood-based study centers, with state-of-the-art computer labs.
- It provided and installed personal computers for 285 PHG students in their homes.
- It brought resources and human services into neighborhoods in need of assistance.
- It strengthened connections between schools, parents, homes and neighborhoods.

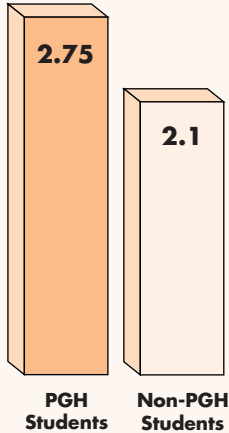
Several PHG students made the honor roll for the first time ever. In other cases, PHG staff reported that students with very low grades were able to raise them significantly.

"My kids' grades came up a considerable amount," says Mighty Mom Jacqui

Brown. "I had one student, when he first came he had Ds and Fs. He wasn't coming on a daily basis like he was supposed to, but after he saw how easy-going we were and how we liked to work with the kids, he started coming more. Then he brought me his report card and he went from Ds to Cs to Bs."

**PHG Graduating Senior Class Grade Point Average**

**PHG Cumulative Grade Point Average**



Year 1: Graduated 1998

Student	GPA
o.a.	3.2
c.a.	1.6
r.b.	2.0
r.b.	2.0
l.c.	2.0
e.c.	3.8
k.d.	n/a
a.e.	3.1
c.g.	n/a
a.h.	2.1
f.g.	1.5
r.h.	2.0
l.j.	3.7
w.l.	n/a
r.l.	2.5
j.l.	3.0
k.m.	2.0
c.m.	3.1
l.p.	3.5
n.r.	n/a
c.r.	2.5
c.s.	3.3
t.w.	1.9
m.w.	n/a

Year 2: Graduated in 1999

Student	GPA
a.b.	2.0
n.b.	2.1
l.b.	3.286
v.b.	2.1
k.b.	2.1
r.c.	3.5
s.c.	2.1
r.c.	3.0
l.d.	3.4
k.e.	3.2
k.e.	n/a
t.h.	2.0
a.j.	3.0
y.l.	3.0
d.m.	1.0
a.m.	1.9
s.m.	2.0
a.m.	2.2
d.p.	2.5
v.r.	2.0
j.r.	2.0
n.s.	2.3
s.w.	2.5
c.w.	2.0

Year 3: Graduated in 2000

Student	GPA
l.b.	2.6
v.b.	2.1
m.b.	3.1
s.b.	2.8
l.b.	n/a
k.b.	2.0
c.c.	1.7
t.c.	2.67
t.d.	2.7
t.g.	1.4
c.h.	2.2
s.h.	2.0
c.j.	2.1
j.j.	2.0
t.m.	2.4
r.o.	3.0
i.p.	2.33
c.s.	2.1
t.v.	3.1
d.w.	1.69

**Higher Graduation Rates and Lower Dropout Rates**

In 1998, PHG’s first year, 87.5% of its senior class graduated. Only 3% actually dropped out of school. This compares to a 14% dropout rate for the School District as a whole. That same year, the evaluation

found that only 63% of the non-PHG seniors from the same schools graduated.

PHG’s graduation rate remained consistently high for the next two years of the pi-

lot: 90.9% in 1999 and 90.5% in 2000 (see table on page 40).

Only one PHG 12th grader in all three years of the pilot failed to graduate because of incarceration.

In addition, only one PHG student dropped out of school because she was pregnant. Not a single 12th grader failed to graduate because she was pregnant.

**Better Scores in Achievement Test**

In 1997, D.C. Public Schools introduced the Stanford Assessment Test Series, 9th Edition, one of the most widely used and respected national achievement tests. Through a combination of multiple-choice and open-

“I was very relieved and I was very proud of myself when I graduated because nobody thought I was going to do it, because in my family, I was the first to graduate high school.”

— Taneka Veasley, PHG Graduate

ended formats, the Stanford 9 helps educators assess the depth of their students' educational achievements.

Overall, PHG students scored better than their public school non-PHG cohorts in all but one content category of the Stanford 9.

For the total reading score, PHG students scored an average of 85 points, 10 points higher than their cohorts. In math, PHG students scored an average of 31 points, 7 points higher than their cohorts. In vocabulary, PHG students scored an average of 25 points, 5 points higher than their cohorts. The only category where PHG students scored lower was in reading comprehension, where there was a slight 3 point

### PHG Students Score Better on Stanford 9 Test

Comparison of PHG students Stanford 9 scores with their non-PHG cohorts.

Test Topic	PHG Score average	Non-PHG Score average	Difference
Total Reading	85	75	+10
Math	31	24	+7
Vocabulary	25	20	+5
Reading Comprehension	29	31	-3

margin between PHG and non-PHG students (see table above).

### School Attendance

According to the evaluation, PHG participants "had lower absenteeism and tardiness rates than their DCPS cohorts living in the same region."

Mighty Moms said that they initially noticed that many students were not accustomed to attending school every day, but over time they began to attend school regularly and worked harder to complete their assignments. They attributed this success to the assistance provided by the PHG tutors and tutor coordinators.

### Profiles of PHG Graduates



**Keia Burns**

Graduated Wilson High School

Received \$4,100 in Financial Assistance

Attending Norfolk University in Virginia



**Taneka Veasley**

Graduated Coolidge High School

Received \$4,100 in Financial Assistance

Attending Norfolk University in Virginia

### ADVANCING BEYOND HIGH SCHOOL

In PHG's evaluation, a majority of PHG students (60%) acknowledged that, initially, they had no intention of pursuing a particular trade or a college degree. But because of their participation in the PHG's *College or Career, Next Year* training, 89% of the juniors and seniors stated that they were motivated

**PHG Graduation Rates Consistently High for 3 Years**

Year 1: Graduated 1998		Year 2: Graduated in 1999		Year 3: Graduated in 2000	
PHG 12th Grader Initials	Graduated High School	PHG 12th Grader Initials	Graduated High School	PHG 12th Grader Initials	Graduated High School
o.a.	yes	a.b.	yes	l.b.	yes
c.a.	yes **	n.b.	yes	v.b.	yes
r.b.	no	l.b.	yes	m.b.	yes
r.b.	yes	v.b.	yes	s.b.	yes
l.c.	yes	k.b.	unknown	l.b.	no
e.c.	yes	r.c.	yes	k.b.	yes
k.d.	yes	s.c.	yes	c.c.	yes
a.e.	yes	r.c.	yes	t.c.	yes
c.g.	yes*	l.d.	yes	t.d.	yes
a.h.	yes	k.e.	yes	f.e.	yes *
f.g.	yes*	k.e.	yes	t.g.	no
r.h.	yes	t.h.	yes	c.h.	yes *
l.j.	yes	a.j.	yes	s.h.	yes
w.l.	no	y.l.	yes	c.j.	yes
r.l.	yes	d.m.	yes	j.j.	yes
j.l.	yes	a.m.	yes	t.m.	yes *
k.m.	yes	s.m.	yes	r.o.	yes
c.m.	yes	a.m.	yes	i.p.	yes
l.p.	yes	d.p.	yes	c.s.	yes
n.r.	unknown	v.r.	yes	t.v.	yes
c.r.	yes	j.r.	no	d.w.	yes **
c.s.	yes	n.s.	yes		
t.w.	yes	s.w.	yes		
m.w.	yes	c.w.	yes		
<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
24	21	22	20	21	19

\* These students attended summer school and graduated two months after their graduating class.

\*\* These two students, on the verge of dropping out, were helped to prepare for the Graduate Equivalency Diploma (GED) test. They passed, allowing them to attend college (in one case) or take a job involving training (in the other case).

to pursue college, trade school or other options.

“A lot of the kids began to look forward to going to college, where they hadn’t been thinking about it before. They started thinking about which college they wanted to go to, what courses they wanted to take, what they wanted to major in.”

—Mighty Mom Jacqui Brown

PHG’s support and college preparation also enabled students to overcome fears and

obstacles to taking the tests necessary to get into college and advance.

“If I weren’t in PHG, I wouldn’t have ever taken my SAT test. I just wouldn’t have. But I knew I had to take it to get into Norfolk [University].”

—Teresa Davis, PHG Student

Over the course of three years, 70% of PHG’s graduates applied to college or trade school. All these students were accepted into a university or trade school. Schools

that PHG seniors were accepted to included:

- University of the District of Columbia
- Norfolk State
- Hampton University
- Montgomery Community College
- Prince George’s Community College
- Howard University
- Bowie State University
- Morgan State University

With the assistance of PHG’s *College or Career, Next Year* component, all the students who planned to enroll in a post-secondary institution were able to get through the financial aid maze, apply for aid and receive at least \$4,100 in assistance. In one case, a PHG student received a full scholarship to a four-year college.

PHG was also able to convince financial aid directors to waive application fees for PHG students.

PHG did not just open doors to further education by helping overcome the financial barriers. By exposing students to their options, it also allowed students to have hope and think about their future.

“[In five years] hopefully I’ll have my Master’s degree in accounting and financing and I will be out of school and hopefully working towards either an internship or my first job.”

—Taneka Veasley, PHG Graduate

The fields of interest that PHG students pursued in college covered a wide range of careers (*see box on this page*).

## IMPACT OF PHG ACTIVITIES

From the perspective of PHG students themselves, what impact did PHG have on their advancement? Which PHG activities had the biggest impact on them?

A survey of PHG’s first junior and senior class demonstrated that the four most meaningful components of PHG’s program were:

- On-site tutoring.
- College and career preparation.
- Adult mentoring relationships.
- Life skills workshops.

Of the juniors and seniors interviewed, 93% of the students felt that the on-site, one-on-one tutorial assistance was the most helpful assistance that PHG provided, and 89% felt that PHG’s *College or Career, Next Year* training component helped them achieve their graduation goals and advance.

PHG participants also stated that they formed close bonds with Mighty Moms, Site Coordinators, tutors and Big Brothers and Big Sisters, and that the positive reinforcement from these relationships directly influenced and motivated them to remain in school and graduate —despite the negative influences around them. Working one-on-one was the essential part of the equation.

According to the evaluation, “The idea of surrogate parenting was extremely helpful and significantly meaningful in PHG

### Fields of Interest of PHG Graduates Enrolled in College or Trade School

- Nursing Program
- Mortuary Science
- Medical Assistant
- Law Enforcement
- Child Psychology
- Engineering
- Sports Medicine
- Dancing
- Business
- Culinary Arts
- Computer Science
- Architecture
- Paramedic
- Journalism
- Accounting
- Psychology
- Carpentry

### Most Useful Components of PHG from PHG Students' Perspective



Source: Evaluation conducted by Naiker and King.

students' pursuit of grade advancement, graduation and post-secondary options."

### THE POWER TO BUILD COMMUNITY

From the beginning, collaborators who signed on to PHG's vision believed that PHG's approach would add value to their work. They understood from experience that their services alone could not meet the complex needs of teens at-risk and prevent them from dropping out of high school. A well-orchestrated, holistic campaign had the potential to have a far greater impact.

This philosophy and approach motivated numerous organizations to participate, invest their resources, mobilize their membership, donate money and support PHG. As a result, PHG successfully influenced collaborating agencies to direct more attention and resources toward the five low-income neighborhoods targeted in the Demonstration.

Many collaborators acknowledged that participating in PHG raised their awareness of the need for agencies and organizations to collectively work toward the common goal of helping disadvantaged youth in low-income neighborhoods.

Collaborating organizations also reported that PHG was well structured and designed.

"Although we are experienced in working with students, we found that PHG hurdled a cluster of obstacles that disparate, single-service approaches are not capable of overcoming. PHG also made major strides by logically designing a comprehensive approach that attacked the heart of these students' problems while addressing their immediate and basic needs."

—Drexel King, University of the District of Columbia Educational Talent Search

Being part of an initiative which produced results also motivated collaborators and staff to continue their efforts with PHG. Several Mighty Moms said that, while working every day with a neglected population was not always easy, seeing how much the students were accomplishing was rewarding and more than compensated for the frustration they felt during difficult times. They also stated that PHG allowed them to assist community youth who were overwhelmed, helping them keep their lives on track.

"Kids need to know that someone genuinely cares and is sincerely interested in helping them complete their education."

—Mighty Mom Jackie Brown

## CONCLUSION

After collecting and analyzing the data, PHG's evaluators concluded that it had "strategically intervened in cost-effective ways to save lives and begin to break the poverty cycle."

But while this data is impressive, "the numbers alone don't show its true successes," believes site coordinator Lisa Rawlings. "The success was in what was built. The kids wanted to come back. Seventh graders wanted to get in. Families were invested. Resident Councils were invested."

"The most important benefit was the hope it brought these kids," Rawlings adds.

Much of that hope came from doing better in school, a change that is documented by the statistics. But the hope also came from seeing more of the outside world, a



change that is harder to document. "Their environments are so challenging," explains Rawlings. "Which is an understatement. The trips helped open up their worlds. They helped them see things in new ways.

"They could learn so much from these experiences. Kids are intimidated going outside what they know. The trips helped them overcome this."

The evaluation attributed much of PHG's success to the broad "surrogate parenting" role it performed. This involved not just showing them the outside world and helping them sense a future for themselves, but also helping them deal with their day-to-day problems. "You had to be there every day," is how site coordinator Ruqaiyah Smith puts it.

Putting together a program like PHG that both keeps kids in school and gives them hope for their future was neither easy nor cheap. It took a lot of energy and time from dozens of staff and volunteers. It cost about \$4100 per student.

Poulard stresses that the \$4100 figure is what it cost to put together a program that, while it worked with the schools, was completely outside the school district's budget. If a school district began a PHG-type program, its costs would be considerably less, Poulard believes. He points out that the District's school system is already paying about \$9000 per student per year.

### Conquering the Digital Divide

At a time when the digital divide is a major obstacle to equalizing educational opportunities for young people in low-income, minority families, PHG, acquired, at no cost 375 computers, one for each PHG student and between seven and 12 for each of the five neighborhood study centers. Many came through a partnership with a for-profit computer company.

“The key is for a school district to decide that it has to make a fundamental change in how it is addressing its dropout problem. Once it does this, it can find the money to pay for the core operations.”

The other key, Poulard believes, is to keep focusing on what it means for a teenager to stay in school and graduate. “By graduating from high school, these students will increase their earnings by about one-third over the course of their lifetimes. They reduce their chances of going to jail or of having babies when they are still teenagers. All of this has a monetary value, not just for these individuals, but also for the society as a whole.”

What is harder to put a monetary value on is the hope that many PHG participants discovered. “But hope is what allows young people to focus on—and work towards—their futures,” says Poulard. “It is what gives them the motivation to stay in school and do better in school.”

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> The evaluation, conducted by Naiker and King, reviewed at random academic achievements of 50 students enrolled in the PHG in its first year, compared to 50 non-PHG students from District of Columbia Public Schools. They came from a database of 917 students who were attending the same consortium of schools. Both the PHG and non-PHG sampling had 10 students from each grade level, 8th-12th. Report cards of the 50 randomly selected PHG students were collected from the schools they attended during that academic year. Report cards of the 50 non-PHG participants were also collected. Each report card contained grades and a summary of the student’s school attendance. Every student’s grade point average for the year was calculated prior to calculating a cumulative PHG student average and a DCPS cumulative average. Additional information was gathered to compare, determine and assess graduation rates, dropout rates and Stanford Nine standings. An ethnographic study was also conducted in which on-site PHG personnel and volunteers (Mighty Moms and Pops, resident council presidents and collaborating organizations) were interviewed to assess their perceptions of PHG.

<sup>2</sup> DC Kids Count at [www.dckidscount.org](http://www.dckidscount.org)



# Replication

*“Policymakers in public school systems must begin to place ample emphasis on alternatives, such as PHG, which have demonstrated the capacity to help teens graduate and become more independent. Substantially reducing high school dropout rates among low-income teens will help prevent chronic dependency and poverty, rather than merely ameliorating its consequences.”*

—Othello Poulard  
PHG Director

By design, the PHG model is readily replicable. Its potential is thus substantial. “The longer school districts delay using such a model,” says PHG’s Director Othello Poulard, “the more student casualties will occur in the failing, traditional, business-as-usual public school system.”

The PHG model has two essential features: adequate incentives and the strategic use of readily available, essential collaborators. Their participation makes the model holistic and affordable.

Poulard believes the model, tailored to accommodate the unique circumstances of local school districts, could serve as an alternative to the traditional approach of an entire school district or individual schools. Or, PHG could be replicated as an add-on to what a school district is now doing rather than a complete alternative.

## SCHOOL INITIATIVE

School boards and educators, whose mission is to improve overall academic standards, are in the best position to replicate PHG. To adopt a PHG model, however, schools may need to stop doing business as usual and redeploy existing resources.

The special needs and limited school-readiness of low-income teens—as well as the major deficiencies in many of their schools—make it impossible for teachers, alone,

“All too often, school board members are like firefighters on the ground, battling the flames, when they should be in a helicopter above the fire, able to see how extensive the blaze is, which way the wind is blowing, and where the resources need to be deployed.”

—Davis Campbell, Executive Director, California School Boards Association, during the Urban School Boards Initiative

to meet the individual academic needs of each student. But teachers don't have to be alone. The PHG model offers schools the ability to leverage existing resources to provide a more holistic and effective approach to education. Students can have the one-on-one academic support they need. And PHG can give them life and leadership skills and surround them with an extended family that helps them stay the course.

The PHG model also offers educators a way to strengthen the link between what happens at school and at home. Although homework by definition is work done at home, for many students it is not possible to study at home. They face many barriers: they may be overwhelmed by family problems, parents may not know how to help them study, they may not have a decent place to study, they may need to take care of younger siblings, and much more. The result is often that homework does not get done, and students fall further behind and drop out. PHG provided teenagers with an environment that allows them to do their homework.

## GETTING THE WHOLE DROPOUT PICTURE

Although it's not necessary to wait for a lengthy study of the problem to start a PHG effort, school boards, educators and community members may need to more fully understand the extent of their local dropout problem and its dire consequences on local teens before starting.

The key rate is not how many students drop out in a particular year, but how many drop out over the 4-year period from when they enter high school. This rate is often

four times higher than the annual dropout rate, according to the National School Board Association.

Awareness of this rate can motivate a school system to try alternative approaches like PHG. It can also help target this approach on individual schools or neighborhoods that have exceptionally high dropout rates.

## STAFFING

The Center for Community Change launched the PHG Demonstration for nearly 200 8th–12th graders over three years with two highly motivated core management staff, two part-time education consultants, one part-time logistics consultant, three site coordinators, 5–8 Mighty Moms and Pops, about 20 after-school academic tutors, a part-time case manager/social worker, a part-time computer consultant, and dozens of staff from collaborating organizations.

## THE ENDLESS POTENTIAL FOR COLLABORATION

A linchpin in the design and implementation of the PHG model was ongoing collaboration with existing organizations and programs. As PHG developed, it found an abundance of organizations willing to collaborate. During the three-year pilot, it established 34 collaborations. Most partners volunteered their services and time.

Collaborators included nonprofits, for-profit businesses, the public sector, large membership-based national organizations, universities, health and human service

groups, youth and leadership development groups, a bank, juvenile justice programs, sororities and fraternities, and public and private funders.

What attracted them to PHG was a number of factors including:

- PHG was a holistic approach to helping young people help themselves.
- The partners would be part of a well-coordinated, multi-disciplinary effort.
- PHG’s focus was on decreasing and preventing future poverty.
- PHG could reach more young people more effectively than a single approach.
- PHG provided access into low-income communities with which many partners had little or no relationship.

“Most people and organizations want to believe that what they are doing is making a difference,” explains Poulard. “PHG gave them a sense that the service or support they could provide—when added to the services that others were providing—really made a difference in the lives of these students.”

PHG’s potential for collaboration was truly endless, with as much room for creativity, impact and community-building as there were partners.

## POTENTIAL SOURCES OF FUNDING AND SUPPORT

PHG’s model offers schools a way to target limited dollars to pay for a core staff that can garner hundreds of thousands of dollars in resources and orchestrate existing programs to establish a sustained, commu-

nity-based education program. As a pilot, PHG received its initial seed money from a private sector corporation, the Potomac Electric Power Company (PEPCO). The bulk of its operating funds came from HUD: an average of about \$860,000 per year.

During its three-year demonstration, PHG raised more than \$525,000 in in-kind contributions.

These contributions included neighborhood-based study centers, volunteers to renovate the centers, tutors, Mighty Moms, educational materials and supplies, computers, and tickets for cultural and professional sporting events (see box on page 49 for more details).

“The resources in this city—really any city—are abundant,” John Hampton, of the D.C. Housing Authority, notes.

There are also a wealth of additional potential funding sources and resources that models like PHG may explore, such as:

### PHG’s Infrastructure at a Glance

Core Administrative Staff  
 Director (half-time)  
 Administrative Assistant

Special Start-up Staff  
 Education Consultant (2 part-time)  
 Logistics Consultant (part-time)

Program Operations Consultants  
 Educational Liaison to Schools (1 part-time)  
 Cultural Programming  
 Computer Consultant (part-time)

On-Site Teams  
 Site Coordinator (1 for every 1-2 sites)  
 Mighty Moms (1-2 per site)  
 Academic Tutor Coordinators (1 per site)  
 Tutors (1 to every 8-10 students)  
 Case Manager (1 part-time)

Collaborating Organizations  
 See page 48 for list

“The benefit of the PHG Initiative was obvious to participating students—but no less to our entire city.”

—Judge Iraline Barnes,  
 Vice President Corporate Affairs,  
 PEPCO

## PHG's Collaborators at a Glance

Below is a list of key organizations that collaborated with PHG. **Comparable collaborators exist in every school district.**

### Academic Tutoring

Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc  
 AmeriCorps  
 District of Columbia Pan-Hellenic Council  
 Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.  
 Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc.  
 Students at Howard University  
 Students at University of the District of Columbia  
 Students at University of Maryland

### Extended Family

AmeriCorps VISTA: Provided Mighty Moms and Pops.  
 D.C. Housing Authority: Helped recruit Mighty Moms.  
 Resident Councils: Helped recruit Mighty Moms.  
 Metro Teens Aids: Brother-to-Brother/Sister-to-Sister  
 Iota Phi Theta Fraternity, Inc.: Mentoring

### Life, Leadership and Health

Ala-Teen: Coping with family/friend alcohol/drug abuse.  
 Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.: Health fairs and services.

Planned Parenthood of Greater DC: Teen pregnancy prevention and sex education.  
 D.C. Consumer Credit Counseling: Budget management.  
 NE Place: Life skills development  
 Teens Against the Spread of HIV/AIDS: HIV/AIDS education  
 Sasha Bruce Youth Program: Drug/alcohol education  
 D.C. Rape Crisis Center: Self-defense strategies.

Youth Leadership: Self-esteem and public-speaking skills.  
 International Women's Center for Democracy and Fit  
 Physique: Training to be physical fitness specialists.  
 Time Dollar Institute: Training students to serve on juries.  
 Toastmasters, Inc.: Public speaking and listening skills.

### Computers

Job Boss Software, Minneapolis: Donated computers.  
 Black Data Processing Association: Computer training and repair  
 U.S. Department of Agriculture: Supplied modems.

### College Readiness

Talent Search, University of the District of Columbia:  
 Ran PHG's *College or Career, Next Year* component.  
 District of Columbia Public School System: Assisted in carrying out the range of college-readiness initiatives.

### Center Set-Up

AmeriCorps: Converted vacant buildings.  
 D.C. Public Housing Authority: Provided space.  
 District of Columbia Public School System: Provided space for PHG program activities.

### Resources

NationsBank: Opened checking accounts for PHG students' work-study allowances.

### Volunteer Groups

National Council of Negro Women, Inc.: Initial endorser  
 National Urban League: Initial endorser  
 The Points of Light Foundation: Prepared program materials for recruiting and screening all PHG volunteers.

### For More Information

National Dropout Prevention Center has a useful list of potential collaborators with "links" that bring you to the websites of approximately 50 organizations, including mentoring groups, data collectors, foundations, educators and other organizations working on prevention strategies.

Go to: <http://www.dropoutprevent.org/2levelpages/2lvl/Links.htm>

- Community Development Block Grant Funds
- Juvenile Justice Programs
- Foundations
- Work Investment Board Funding
- Department of Education Funds
- Drug Prevention Funds
- Public Housing Resident Services Funds

- Religious Organizations Support
- Public Technology Programs
- Individual Wealthy Donors
- Corporate Infrastructures

The PHG model also has the potential to raise a significant amount of individual donations. It never attempted to do this, but it received unsolicited gifts, an indication of an untapped well.

## PUBLIC HOUSING AND BEYOND

The PHG model is by no means a public housing program. It is an educational model with implications far beyond public housing because there are more poor children who don't live in public housing than who do.

Nevertheless, public housing developments might be one place to base PHG study centers. In addition to space, public housing authorities have access to HUD funding programs. Many have resident organizations that are connected to the community. Public housing authorities may already have partnerships with youth programs and other needed services.

HUD also offers resident groups and housing authorities access to funding and resources for resident services and resident community-building efforts. In addition, HUD has regional staff known as Community Builders, whose function is to help facilitate collaborations such as PHG. (Note: Housing authorities are now required to submit plans every year documenting the service-related programs that they promote or have developed in partnership with other organizations. These plans may offer some early insight into collaborative potential.)

A PHG center, however, could easily be located in schools or other neighborhood facilities. What is critical is that the center be accessible to kids at risk of dropping out and conducive to studying. And if a PHG center is located in public housing, it can and should be made available to neighborhood kids who do not live in public housing.

## HOW TO GET STARTED

Anyone can start the PHG ball rolling: school board members, superintendents, principals, parents, teachers unions or community groups.

Poulard believes it is especially important for policymakers and public school administrators to move towards a promising alternative such as PHG. "The traditional approaches are failing to have a substantial impact on the academic progress of their students," he says.

Involvement by the local school system is critical for another reason: it offers the potential that a pilot PHG-type program will be continued and expanded. The magazine *Youth Today* contacted 30 organizations that had received funding from the federal government's now defunct School Dropout Demonstration Assistance Program (SDDAP). Of these 30, only 12 had some version of the SDDAP-funded initiative still going. Many of these 12 were serv-

### PHG In-Kind Donations

#### Computers

Over two years, JobsBOSS, a private computer business in Minneapolis, Minnesota, donated dozens of computers to PHG. The U.S. Department of Agriculture donated hundreds of computers.

#### Mighty Moms

AmeriCorp/VISTA provided stipends for four full-time VISTA workers to be Mighty Moms.

#### Tutors

AmeriCorp provided stipends for 12 full-time AmeriCorp volunteers to be tutors.

#### More Tutors

Delta Sigma Theta and Zeta Phi Beta provided approximately 10 volunteers from their sororities to tutor three hours, three days each week.

#### Facilities for College and Career Prep

Local universities, especially the University of the District of Columbia (UDC), provided program space and facilities for PHG's *College or Career* program. UDC also provided access to its college-readiness program, Talent Search.

#### PHG Study Centers

The D.C. Housing Authority provided space for five PHG centers.

#### Cultural and Recreational Events

Performing arts and recreational centers provided hundreds of tickets for cultural and professional sporting events.

#### Materials and Supplies

The Points of Light Foundation prepared program materials to screen volunteers for the safety of the students.

## Launching a PHG: The Macro View

### 1 Needs Assessment

Identify youth at-risk.

### 2 Resource Identification and Program Development

Map out existing resources, identify major organizational endorsers.

Develop core staffing and funding plan.

Determine key services that need to be provided.

### 3 Start-up

Fund program

Hire program director and core staff

Develop a year one workplan

### 4 Operation

Identify and sign up potential collaborators: school representatives, youth, human service, and volunteer groups.

Develop academic program and monitoring systems.

Recruit, select and orient part-time academic tutors.

Develop program resources and materials.

Establish student centers.

### 5 Community Involvement

Introduce neighborhood parents and local leaders to program.

Recruit and train on-site Mighty Moms.

### 6 Student Participation

Develop recruitment strategies.

Register students.

Develop special outreach for hard-to-reach students.

Conduct individualized student needs assessments and support plans.

### 7 Launch Program

Start daily academic tutoring and mentoring.

Schedule extracurricular programs and workshops.

Plan enrichment and cultural activities.

Organize community activities.

Start college/career preparation for 11th and 12th graders.

Refine individual student support plans.

### 8 Take Stock

Evaluate the year.

Report back to stakeholders and collaborators.

Retool for the next year.

ing far fewer students than they had been serving. Even initiatives that had been successful, such as an alternative school for dropouts in Georgia, could not get money to continue. However, in Flint, Michigan, a

SDDAP-funded alternative school run by the school district was still going strong.

While getting the school system to embrace a PHG-type program is critical, community organizations and others concerned about at-risk students can play a key advocacy role. The first step is convincing the school board and administrators that they have to try a new approach. Publicizing the 4-year dropout rate can be one way to do this. PHG's success can be used to make the point that graduation rates *can* be dramatically raised. Advocates also can play a key role in convincing a school system to devote significant resources to a new program, to focus on the full range of needs experienced by at-risk students, and to target resources on neighborhoods and schools with the most at-risk students.

## DON'T HAVE TO REINVENT THE WHEEL

To assist those committed to pursuing a PHG model in their community, the Center for Community Change has prepared hands-on materials for each of PHG's components. They include a substantial amount of the training, preparation, implementation and assessment materials developed during the three years (*see page 61*).

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Leadership Matters: Transforming Urban School Boards, The National School Boards Foundation, March 1999.

<sup>2</sup> "Taking a more accurate—and more dismal—look at dropout rates" by Diane Brockett, School Board News, National School Board Association, February 22, 2000.



# What we learned

As anyone who has built a model program would say, you learn a lot as you are building it. Indeed, what you learn can sometimes be as valuable as what you accomplish.

Those who put together and ran the PHG Demonstration learned a tremendous amount.

Some of these lessons reflect principles that guided PHG's development, such as the need to be comprehensive and to involve many partners. The experience of building PHG reinforced the importance of many of its early guiding principles.

Other lessons came from the experience of putting together and running day-to-day such a complex demonstration program. Developing a model like PHG never is as straightforward and linear as initial workplans might suggest. PHG was forever in motion, experiencing growing pains, re-tooling and expanding...much as its students were doing. It is impossible to predict all the challenges a new program will face.

A PHG-type program will also vary according to who sponsors it, who funds it and what a local community's needs and resources are.

What follow are lessons about the underlying principles and assumptions that can help you start a similar program in your community and work through the inevitable but resolvable challenges.

While taken together all these lessons and challenges may make the task seem overwhelming, the first lesson is that *it can be done*. "This is not rocket science" is Othello Poulard's mantra.

"We know what works," agrees Jay Smink of the Dropout Prevention Center. "It's a matter of committing to it and doing

## More ideas about what works

In 1999 the Center for Community Change completed a study of five programs providing comprehensive services to public housing residents, often young residents. The study includes a chapter called "What Makes These Programs Successful." It explains 13 principles that contributed to the success these programs experienced in working with very low income families.

The publication is available from the Center (1000 Wisconsin Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20007, [www.CommunityChange.org](http://www.CommunityChange.org)).



it. It takes somebody with a great amount of vision to be able to put it together in their school and community.”

That vision should not just entail building a program that helps students graduate and go on to do well, as important as that is.

“What drove me,” Poulard says, “was the conviction that we were building something that was attacking a main *cause* of chronic dependency, not something that simply was providing a nice service that only ameliorates one symptom of chronic poverty.”

**Use incentives that have the potential of pulling in virtually all the students in the target area.**

“The numbers don’t show the true successes of PHG,” says site coordinator Lisa Rawlings. “Success is in seeing the growth in students. It’s seeing an 11<sup>th</sup> grader finally learning to read or seeing a young lady finally understand and overcome a powerfully negative attitude.” PHG’s ability to “help those at the margins” is what defines its success, Rawlings believes.

But first you have to engage those kids at the margins. “There are a few kids who are going to make it whether a program is in place or not,” says Poulard. “If you set up a program, many of those kids will come. But the kids who most people think are *not* going to make it are the ones you have to pull in.”

The work/study allowance did this, Poulard believes. The evaluation found that it was the “primary incentive” that got kids

to sign up to participate. “Even a relatively modest financial stipend is a near-certain incentive to attract kids,” Poulard explains.

Poulard loves to respond to people who claim that paying children to participate in a program is bribery. “Kids who do well in school from an early age get all kinds of perks. They get recognition. Good grades. Special programs. Special attention from teachers. All of that fuels their motivation.

But many of PHG’s kids have never gotten any perks associated with school. If they get anything, it is negative reinforcement. Negative expectations. Peer pressure to *not* invest time in school. They need something that will push them to do what has become a bad experience for many of them: going to school and working at academics. That is the role the money plays.”

One key is to make the tie between the allowance and academic work very clear at the beginning. “Some kids think of it as an entitlement,” explains Ruqaiyah Smith, a PHG site coordinator. “They ask, ‘Where’s my check?’ You need to keep reinforcing the idea that the money is for the work they are doing to improve their academics.”

“In time students began to recognize the value of participating in the program,” she adds. “That became a primary motivation to continue.”

**Include in the program as many kids as possible from each neighborhood.**

For most kids in middle school and high school, being cool is essential. In some neighborhoods, doing well at school—or going to an after-school tutoring session instead of playing ball or hanging out—is definitely not cool. Peer attitudes like these

A work/study cash incentive is likely to influence nearly all the students in a target area to sign up and continue to participate.

can undermine the best programs. Thus Poulard believes that a key to PHG's success was that it engaged nearly all the students in each public housing development.

Peer pressure is enormous. You can maximize positive peer influence—and prevent the all-too-common negative peer pressure on those who focus on academics—by setting up the program and establishing eligibility criteria so that virtually *all* the students in a targeted neighborhood participate.

“If it ain't cool, you are not going to get the kids,” he says. “And it won't be cool if you are the only one going to tutoring.”

As PHG established itself at the five sites, Smith said that seventh graders and children from nearby neighborhoods wanted to participate, a sure sign of coolness!

### **Focus on the full range of the students' needs...and meet as many of them as possible.**

“Academic support by itself is just not enough,” Poulard says. “You need to provide the whole range of academic and personal support that mainstream teens routinely get from their families and churches and schools.”

These students need the same range of personal and academic supports that most teenagers routinely receive at home.

Poulard said that many parents or guardians could not be counted on to intervene when told about a problem their child was having at school.

“Some parents just were not interested,” says Rawlings. “You would call them about their child and they would say, ‘Don't call me about him. You handle it.’”

Because of the absence of parental guidance and support in some of these children's families, “you can't focus on the academic programs alone,” Poulard believes.

“For many of these kids, there is an almost complete lack of structure at home,” says Smith. “It takes continuous reinforcement.”

You are not just trying to teach young people how to read or add, Smith explains. You are also helping them “establish a strong value system,” one that values learning to read and add.

“You are trying to change someone's mindset. The academics are important. But until their minds are freed, until the barriers are overcome, you aren't going to get the desired result.”

The need to change mindsets and attitudes is one reason PHG required almost daily participation by its students. One speech—even from a luminary like a basketball star—isn't enough.

“You can tell a child something over and over,” says Smith. “And then you feel like you didn't say anything. You just have to continue to reinforce the values you are trying to communicate.”

“The world outside is competition. Sometimes the world inside a student's home is competition.”

In the outside world, it isn't just that a student often experiences negative attitudes about learning and school. It is also that materialism is such a strong influence on these

students, Smith believes. “They have learned to find self-worth in material things. In what they wear.” The value of delaying material gratification to study and prepare for the future must be learned.

When a student’s home also does not support the value of learning and the other values that PHG taught, that student can experience a powerful internal conflict, Smith believes. “For many of our students, there was an almost complete lack of structure at home,” explains Smith. “It takes continuous reinforcement.”

She believes the key is to understand these pressures and to resist condemning students because they don’t quickly respond to what the program is trying to teach them.

But they can be reached, Smith believes, especially if those who are trying to reach them are consistent and constant. “Young people don’t forget what you say or do,” says Smith. “The words you use with them can have so much power. But they need to see that what you say is also what you do.”

Rawlings remembers a “young lady” who was “so contrary” when she first came to the program, who “always had an attitude.” But Rawlings and others kept working with her until one day she not only acknowledged her attitude as a problem, she started to confront other students with the same problem.

“This work cannot be done without addressing the whole world of the child,” adds Rawlings.

Poulard emphasizes that many mainstream children go through similar struggles. “You have kids with drug problems, who get pregnant, who turn off

school, who have emotional problems. But most of these families can find the resources to deal with these problems. The families involved in PHG simply didn’t have the resources they need.”

**Help students clearly see the concrete connection between their academic work and a brighter future.**

While in many middle class homes it is assumed that children will go to college,

many PHG students had no idea that college is even within the realm of possibility.

This is why PHG devoted so much time to taking its stu-

dents to college campuses and exposing them to college students and graduates. It is also why PHG worked to demystify the whole process of applying to colleges and requesting financial aid.

“Many students thought that there was no way they would be able to go to college because they had done so poorly in school,” Poulard explains. “But we made it as clear as we could that, even at this relatively late date, they could still get into college by getting their high school degree.”

**Carefully think through the role of tutors and what that role requires.**

While the money was the initial incentive to get kids into the program, once they were participating, the bonds they formed

Many students do not understand that, even if they have done very poorly in school, they still can make it to college because of the open admissions policies of many public universities and community colleges.

with tutors, site coordinators and Mighty Moms became a key incentive for them to continue, according to the evaluation. Because of the importance of these bonds, the commitment and skills of the people who volunteer or work for the program become critical.

“The thing these kids do *not* need is for someone they come to trust to disappear,” Poulard explains. “It is very important that you are continuously there,” says Smith.

“Casual volunteers don’t offer this potential for bonding,” Poulard says. “Volunteers need to be committed.” Having them sign a document that expresses this commitment may be useful, he thinks.

Good screening and training is also crucial. “Tutors need to understand how difficult working with some kids in these environments can be,” says Poulard. “They need to understand that their role is not just to provide academic help but also to develop a relationship with each student.” More screening and preparation may reduce turnover, which was high for PHG (as it is for most efforts that try to meet the full range of needs of struggling young people).

Tutors also must have solid academic and teaching skills, Poulard believes. He suggests finding ways to test their skills. “It’s hard to be selective with volunteers,” Poulard acknowledges. “But the role they play is too important for you to just take anybody who is willing to do it.”

Smith thinks that, in addition to their academic skills, what you look for in tutors is similar to what you look for in staff, such as their understanding of innercity young people (see below).

Poulard suggests looking for a partner who can help screen and train volunteers and who understands the importance of a long-term commitment to a hard job.

“The trade-off is that people can learn a lot about reaching at-risk kids and they can get a sense that they have really helped make a difference in the life of a kid who was becoming completely disconnected from mainstream society.”

### **Try very hard to hire staff who know something about relating to students living in these tough environments.**

The PHG program provides a framework for a program that can be easily replicated. “Having a structure like we had is crucial,” says Smith. “All the forms we used helped establish that structure.” But while a program provides the framework, people are the catalysts, Smith says.

“It is so critical to have the right people. The staff need to be able to communicate the vision and the hope, to produce excitement and a sense of the future. It’s one of the primary challenges.”

Smith urges people to spend as much time as possible picking tutors, staff, Mighty Moms, site coordinators and anyone else who comes into contact with the students. In addition to their experience as tutors or as case managers or project staff people, Smith believes you should look closely at two things.

The first is their experience—or at least their willingness to learn—in working with innercity youth.

Because a PHG-type program tries to influence so many parts of a student’s life, the staff who are coordinating the work should not only have academic skills and experience. They also need the ability to understand and manage direct services.

The second is how well they know how to react to challenging situations, such as a conflict between students, or a student who suddenly exhibits a very negative attitude.

She would have candidates do role plays based on situations they may encounter. “The tutors and everyone else need to realize that this is about more than academics. Certain social issues must be addressed. Those working with youth need to understand them and have some empathy. They need to be able to show care. It’s a big role. Some of the bonds between the tutors and the students have been remarkable.”

One key may be setting up the program in a way that allows for flexibility and creativity by staff. This can be an inducement to people who really want to make a difference and are willing to take on a challenge.

“It’s been exciting,” says Smith. “I did more than I thought I could do. The sky’s the limit.”

### Find and train people who can act as liaisons between the school and the student’s home.

Many Mighty Moms—neighborhood residents who served as the primary liaisons between the program and the students’ homes—also formed strong bonds with the students, which was but one of the important roles they played. They provided a connection to a student’s home and neighborhood. Many acted almost as case managers, talking with students every day and pushing them to stay involved in the program.

They also made it easier for PHG to be seen as part of the community. “It’s not just outsiders trying to help these poor little kids,” explains Rawlings. The Mighty Moms understand the environment that the students live in every day. “It makes a difference to have a person who lives in the development,” says Smith. “Kids and parents can be more comfortable with someone who lives in their community. They can be more willing to open up.”

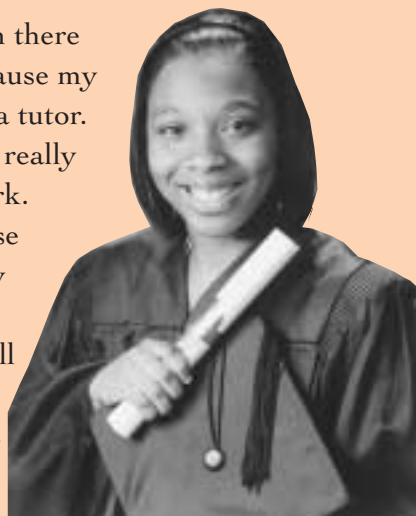
But Mighty Moms also live in the same challenging environment, often for many years. They too are affected by it. Poulard says that engaging and training Mighty Moms was “a real challenge.” Smith says that she “spent much time training Mighty Moms. Many of them face the same challenges as the students.” Smith thinks that having more Mighty Moms would have helped: each one was responsible for as many as 40 students.

Sometimes a few of the Mighty Moms undermined key PHG lessons about how to behave, Rawlings believes. “You tell the students how to be, but they see you cussing and arguing. You have to show them a different way. Show them a different way to

## PHG FOR ME BUT NO PHG FOR MY BROTHER

“I was so mad when there was no more PHG because my little brother, he needs a tutor. He needs a mentor. He really needs help with his work. And I can’t do it because I’ll be at college and my mother will be at work. And I don’t know if he’ll get a tutor at school.”

—Teresa Davis, PHG Graduate



handle confrontation. They are so bombarded with confrontation.”

Given the importance of Mighty Moms’ roles, identifying and training residents to perform these roles is crucial, according to everyone involved with PHG.

### Develop activities involving parents and resources for parents at every turn.

Getting parents or guardians involved in a program such as PHG can be a big challenge. At the beginning of PHG, some parents were uneasy with such an

all-encompassing program. It can be seen as a criticism of them as parents.

PHG held monthly meetings for parents at each site, but only a hand-

ful of parents came. Smith suggests finding the parents’ interests and concerns and using these to engage the parents.

Suggestions and training about how to handle the day-to-day struggles between parent and child can be one way to reach parents. “The relationship between several students and their parents got better,” says Smith. She says that several parents became more aware of verbal abuse. “They learned how to say things to their children without alienating them.”

One message for parents who are angry with their children is that “these youth are a

The inability of many parents to meet their children’s school-related needs is why a program as all-encompassing as PHG was needed. Those who are rearing these students (often single mothers, sometimes grandparents or other relatives) often are facing enormous challenges themselves. You can’t expect most of these parents to provide the supports most children receive at home.

reflection of us,” Smith adds. “We need to remember that.”

Training in how to motivate their children can be helpful. “Many parents know it’s important for their child to be motivated, but they don’t know how to do it,” says Rawlings.

“It is easy to demonize parents,” Rawlings adds. “They are struggling themselves. They have needs like their children have needs. They may be a little jealous that they weren’t able to be in a program like this when they were in school. You need to keep these things in mind when you are trying to reach parents.”

“You can’t assume that most parents of these kids are going to take on the roles performed by the parents of many middle class children,” states Poulard. “Many of these parents have a hard time doing it all. You need to plan how to provide the supports that we often expect parents to provide.”

### Work as closely as possible with the schools the students attend.

PHG was based in public housing and supported primarily by a grant from the Housing and Urban Development Department. It wasn’t based in the schools and supported by the school’s budget. This made it extremely important to develop relationships with the schools and individual teachers. PHG staff did this.

Staff initially went to the principals, getting their okay. Poulard believes a key reason PHG got that support is that a former DC school administrator had become excited about PHG and met with the principals.

Staff received access to school records, which allowed them to quickly identify PHG students who weren't attending class or who were doing poorly. Regular feedback helped keep the students focused and, when they could see progress, motivated.

But working with the schools was also a challenge, Poulard says. Teachers often didn't give PHG's tutors the homework assignments. "When we tried to engage counselors and teachers in the problems these kids were facing, sometimes there was little response. They didn't take adequate advantage of our presence. Finding ways to engage some of these school people is important."

#### **Tie the tutoring to a student's school work.**

PHG required students to bring homework assignments to tutoring. The idea was to help them complete their homework each day. "If you don't have your homework done," Poulard explains, "you will be tempted to skip school and avoid being criticized again."

"Many students told me that, 'If I wasn't here, I wouldn't be doing my homework,'" remembers Smith.

Getting as much feedback from the school as possible is also critical, Smith says. "Students really want to know where they stand. And it helps tutors to get a handle on their students' needs."

#### **Devote time and resources to transportation and work space.**

While Rawlings believes the trips outside the students' neighborhoods, often to colleges or cultural events, were extremely

important, at times they were also "a logistical nightmare." This can hurt attendance. "It would have been so helpful to have a van at each site." This may be another area where a partner could play a critical role: a local church with a van, a local car rental dealer.

Having 20 children in an open room can make studying difficult. Being able to set up small study spaces separated by modular panels would have helped. Again, these are the kinds of things that can be donated.

#### **Develop and use partnerships with a broad range of organizations that can provide many of the services these students need.**

Poulard is convinced that most school districts or even individual schools can find the same or similar collaborating organizations that PHG found. In almost every district, there is a Planned Parenthood chapter or a similar organization that can do training around pregnancy and sexuality. There is some kind of jail divergence program. There are fraternities and sororities that are looking for things to do together that can make a difference. There are companies willing to give away last year's computers.

#### **When enlisting partners, emphasize what you can bring to them.**

"For many of our partners, this was a great opportunity to connect with the kids they wanted to reach but were not reaching," explains Poulard.

He says it was also an opportunity for them to get a sense that what they do is part of a larger strategy that will really make a difference for a lot of kids.

“A lot of people and groups know that, while they may be doing something that is very needed, it often isn’t enough. These kids need more than midnight basketball, or once-a-week tutoring. Many partners got very excited about being part of something that really added up.”

Poulard says that many partners also like the idea that this program was about dealing with a primary *cause* of chronic dependency rather than just ameliorating the symptoms.

“It was seldom a hard sell.”

### **Don’t neglect building a relationship with a neighborhood’s groups and leaders.**

In PHG’s five sites, if the public housing “resident council” was organized and supportive, PHG could get integrated into the community more quickly and effectively. At other sites, local leaders were uncomfortable with PHG as a new program on their “turf,” which made it harder to become integrated.

Trying to enlist and involve local leaders from the beginning is important. They can play a critical role in gaining credibility and understanding. They can also get other residents involved in helping shape and participate in the work.

“Continuous communication with resident leaders” is the key, says Smith. “Keep them abreast of what is going on.”

Also understand that often older resident leaders are sometimes uncomfortable with young people, seeing them as a problem. Working at building more understanding among residents of the realities faced by young people today can help.

### **Push hard for all kinds of resources.**

“It’s not easy. It’s not cheap. It’s not quick,” says James McPartland, director of a Johns Hopkins University center that studies education. He was talking about any effort to significantly lower the dropout rate. PHG started with a two-year, \$1.8 million grant from HUD, a grant that was extended for a third year at \$800,000.

This is not a program that can be done completely by volunteers or even a small community organization, Poulard emphasizes. It takes several staff with talent and commitment.

“You have to work at building partnerships. You have to work at building an effective program that touches on enough of the causes of the dropout problem. You have to work at building relationships with the schools and the neighborhoods. The kids need a lot of on-going attention.”

If anything, PHG could have used *more* resources devoted to hiring good staff to do “case management” with each child and his or her family. Indeed, Smith believes that assigning someone to every child to act as a case worker should be done “from day one.”

One reason it is so important to get the

The funds to support the core work of developing the program and coordinating its diverse parts can definitely be found.



*Americorps volunteers helped fix up the PHG student centers.*

school district to buy into a program like PHG is that it can provide at least some of the core funds—as well as facilities—that such a program needs.

But it's also important and possible to find other sources of support. Many foundations, for example, are very interested not just in education, but in comprehensive approaches to problems, especially approaches that involve many partners. Many companies are interested in supporting anything having to do with education. High tech companies are an obvious target to support computer-related expenses.

But few school districts or cities will be able to find the money to pay for the full range of services and activities involved in a PHG-type program. What made PHG possible and very cost-effective were the multiple partnerships. If PHG had had to pay for every piece of the program provided by a partner, the program's cost could have doubled. But in every city there are similar partners who can bring similar programs and who can be relatively easily enlisted.

In every city there are also many sources of in-kind support: donations of computers, help in setting up computers, desks and chairs for local tutoring centers, services such as carpentry and computer networking. PHG estimates that it got more than \$500,000 worth of in-kind support.

**Don't underestimate the difficulty of the challenge or of your potential to succeed!**

For people who are not connected to the realities of life for students in some neighborhoods, it is easy to underestimate the

task. People assume that these students' parents will be like those in most middle class families. They assume that the students' experiences in school will be similar to those of students in the suburbs. They underestimate the impact of peers and environment. "These environments are so challenging," says Rawlings. "And that is an understatement."

"You need to be very realistic about the whole range of challenges you will face and clear about how you plan to overcome these challenges," Poulard believes.

But don't give up before you even start, he urges. "What you see on the surface with many of these kids can discourage you. Their behavior seems to be determined by their peers and the negative influences in their lives, especially all the stereotypes about what it is to be an innercity kid.

"But just as these kids are vulnerable to bad influences, they are also vulnerable to positive influences. They really respond to investments that people make in them, perhaps more than kids who have a lot more.

"Despite what they project, they are vulnerable to wanting a better life for themselves," Poulard adds. "They are more receptive than even I expected. That's why they could raise their grades so much, why only one kid went to jail, why there was not one pregnancy among the seniors."

"It's not easy," says Smith. "It's not simple. There are so many dynamics. But it is do-able."

"You just need to get past their veneer of disinterest," Poulard believes. "And show them that you will be there day-to-day and that they can trust you."