The Freedom Writers Program was recently developed by a teacher of high school students. Its purpose was releasing feelings of the students through writing, like the ACCE Freedom Writers Program does. It takes place on Farmers Boulevard in Queens, New York, on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Volunteers help children understand a specific topic. This year’s topic was environmental awareness. Some activities were planting our own garden and taking care of it, learning about ways to recycle and improve the environment, and other education activities.

I have learned about the process of recycling and also how it can have major positive effects on the environment, and about planting and nature. I think it is a great program that can give kids around the neighborhood or anywhere a lot of information and a lot of activities to do.

One of the mentors, Mr. Dennis Whaley, feels a similar way. He says, “We learned a lot about the environment and why we need to recycle and what to recycle and what happens to the garbage. Also, I enjoyed it because it teaches our children about the future environment.”

ACCE Freedom Writers: Summer 2012

By Jordan McKenzie

Thoughts on the Program

Here is what the children and volunteers have said about the 2012 Freedom Writers Program:

- “I think that it was good and it was the best Freedom Writers (Program). Why? Because it is interesting.” - Keshawn Brooks
- “I wish I can have the program again and again!” - Justin Nicholas
- “The program taught the children many facts that they may have not known before.” - Denzel Douglas, Youth Volunteer
- “I learned that if we all work together, we can change the world.” - Janaba Collins
The Importance of Reducing, Reusing, and Recycling

As part of the Freedom Writers Program, the students were asked to answer prompts in their journals. One of the prompts asked, “Why is reducing, reusing and/or recycling so important?” To display the students’ and mentors’ understanding and thoughts, here are some of their responses:

- “If we don’t recycle, the Earth will be filled up with garbage. Fresh Kills Landfill received 29,000 tons of garbage. We can reuse soda containers and egg cartons to grow gardens.” - Ronaldo Brooks
- “It is important because it is the law of NYC and so the city won’t be dirty.” - Jaylen McLean
- “Reducing and recycling are important because we can have less landfills and also be able to use items over again as new objects. It can also be important to the environment, by saving more trees and also, if you think carefully, the more paper we waste, the more we cut down our oxygen supply so this way we won’t have to worry about killing trees or our oxygen.” - Jordan McKenzie
- “Recycling is important because we can reuse it [objects] again and again. We can waste less. We can have more money and more energy in our homes and houses.” - Joshua Otulaja
- “Reducing is important because you can save water, energy, and money and the earth. Recycling is important because if you didn’t recycle, there would be landfills everywhere. Sometimes you can reuse stuff instead of using one and throwing it away. Recycling can change the world.” - Janaba Collins
- “Local recycling can also save energy because our waste does not have to be sent far away by trucks. Our garbage can be reprocessed, creating local jobs, and benefitting the economy. This also gives us a better current and future environment.” - Mr. Dennis Whaley

The students tested their understanding of recycling and environmental awareness through activities such as being “litter detectives,” finding different litter in their neighborhood; a game called “How Long Does Trash Last?,” estimating the time for different materials to decompose; and by listening to guest speaker Jon Klar, who discussed how to sort out garbage and played a game with that objective.
A significant part of the Freedom Writers Program was building a community garden. Children, with the help of volunteers and staff, worked hard together to grow plants near a tree and in the backyard. They also incorporated recycling methods by using plastic bags, cardboard, and a reused bookshelf to support their garden. The gardeners had much to say about this activity.

- “I learned so much about plants like how to plant seeds and water plants.” - Jaylen McLean

- “I even learned things such as how to plant a seed the proper way. I also learned how to grow vegetables in a yard.” - Denzel Douglas, Youth Volunteer

With this activity, the children learned several things including the important needs of plants — water, nutrients, sunlight, and attention. They are now on their way to becoming gardening experts.
Madagascar 3

By Ronaldo Brooks

The movie is about a lion who helps the tiger become a better animal. The police officers chased the lion. My favorite part of the movie was when the circus animals did their dance and made the people proud. They didn’t belong at the zoo. They belonged at the circus. My least favorite part was when Marty said “Afro circus.” Also, I didn’t like it when the lion told a lie to the circus animals. I would recommend this movie because it had action and it was funny. The funniest part was when Marty hit the rock and thought he was flying.

Transformers 3

By Jalen Earle

The movie is about robots who are good, Autobots, and robots that are bad, Decepticons. The good robots battle the bad robots to protect the Earth. My favorite part of the movie was when the battle started. My least favorite part was when the good robot betrayed the Autobots.

Ice Age: Continental Drift

By Terffaril Stalworth

In this movie, the ice was breaking. Everyone started to complain and run very fast. My favorite part of the movie was when the tigers were playing together. My least favorite part of the movie was when the ice started to break. I would recommend this movie to a friend because it is a fun movie.

The Avengers

By Joshua Bonner

The movie was action-packed! It has comedy, too. First, Loki appears at a factory and steals the Tesseract. The Avengers team up to try to stop him. My favorite part of the movie was when Iron Man and Thor had a fight in the woods. Then Captain America stopped the fight. Thor slammed his hammer on Captain America’s shield and all the trees fell. However, my least favorite part was all the boring talks. I would definitely recommend this movie because it was really good. Iron Man was funny. He made jokes like when he described himself as a billionaire, philanthropist, and engineer.

It would have been better if Spiderman was in it. Spiderman would have worked out in the movie because of all the Asgardian alien spaceships. Spiderman would be a good addition to the Avengers.
Joshua, Jalen, Jaylen, and I went bowling on Liberty Avenue by the train station. On the way to Liberty Avenue, we passed a park. We went by two busses on July 11, 2012. First, we went on the Q83 and then we went on the Q40. I read a mystery book on the ride. During the trip, I got wet because a kid spilled some soda on me. I got mad and I felt like I wanted to do it to him but I didn’t have a soda can.

Joshua won two games. He said, “It felt exhilarating!” We went bowling to have a fun field trip and so we could calm down all of our craziness. Finally, we calmed down and had a good time there.

By Justin Nicholas

Photos Taken By ACCE Students

In Action

From left to right: Tyreik Andrews shows off the garden bug he found; Joshua Otulaja is ready to garden; After hard work, the first garden is complete; Terffaril Stalworth takes pictures of fellow ACCE student; Niah Moore draws about recycling after a guest from Grow NYC speaks.
Q&A with Mary McGrail and Deirdre Ramos

Q: Joshua: How did you start doing what you are doing now?
A: Deirdre: I went to college in Pennsylvania and studied hard. I realized that I wanted to help people and become a community activist so I applied to CSS (Community Service Society), interviewed with them and got the job.

Mary: I had a number of jobs before this. I used to be a writer; I would write articles and newsletters for the company but then I realized I wanted to get out more and go to neighborhoods and learn photography.

Q: Royanne: What kinds of pictures do you take?
A: Mary: I take pictures that tell stories about New York City and how it needs better neighborhoods. I also take pictures of people – old, young – all kinds of pictures, really.

Q: Jordan: What inspired you to work in this field?
A: Deirdre: Well, I love hanging out with you guys, the future leaders of our community. I am inspired by giving back, to help those who have helped me; life should be dedicated to doing something positive. I write to raise money for programs and to develop them and help better lives.

Recycling Tips

In New York City, we can recycle:

Paper: If you can rip it, you can recycle it.
Metal: Recycle cans, foil & mostly metal.
Glass: Check for the neck and recycle bottles & jars.
Plastic: Check for the neck and recycle bottles & jugs.