



DHS-AIC News Flash



AIC Provides a Host of Opportunities for Youth in Placement

The Achieving Independence Center (AIC) is a one-stop resource for foster youth ages 16-21. AIC provides a host of services that enable its members to acquire basic life skills, employment training job opportunities and even a place to live.

If you are working with a teen in placement and haven't visited the AIC lately here are:

The Top 10 reasons to refer a foster youth to AIC:

1. Housing/SIL:The AIC can help youth obtain housing through the Supportive Housing Program (SHP). SHP helps young people obtain and remain in permanent housing, increase their life skills and education

levels, and develop fun, healthy hobbies. The program focuses on helping youth obtain immediate employment and long-term career goals that will support their ability to be self-sufficient. **Youth must be enrolled in the AIC to be eligible for the Supportive Housing Program.** (For more information about SHP see sidebar on page 3.)

2. Assistance in obtaining Board Extensions: Youth applying for a board extension must document that they are pursuing post secondary education and/or job training that will result in meaningful employment. The AIC can help them create a plan that will support their application.

3. Free Computers: Every month the AIC gives away one or more desk-top computers to youth who complete an essay on why they need one. The AIC also provides IT assistance to help youth with technical problems. The program is made possible by the University of Pennsylvania.

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AIC Hospitality Program Offers Hands-On Training

The culinary arts and hospitality industry is one of the fastest growing industries in the world. To help youth qualify to be part of this fast growing industry, the AIC offers the Hospitality Customer Services Training Program at the Independence Café. The program helps youth learn about the hospitality customer services field



and acquire real work skills as they earn a salary. The program operates in a fully functional euro-style café serving the general public.

Youth work alongside experienced Goodwill staff, preparing food, providing customer service, operating cash registers and maintaining a sanitary and professional retail environment. Members learn to develop and implement a marketing plan, maintain inventory and prepare cash receipts for deposit. They also acquire the diverse skills to operate a variety of restaurant tools and equipment.

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AIC Mentors Help Youth Succeed

Everyone needs a shoulder to lean on now and then. The AIC is seeking mentors who have something to share with a youth in foster care. For youth in placement, mentors help fill an important gap. Like a big brother or sister, they are someone to turn to, to confide in and hang out with. The AIC's mentoring program matches members with mentors who support youth in a variety of ways such as providing caring support, friendship, career advice or networking opportunities. If you know someone who is interested in being a mentor contact the AIC. The only real requirement is compassion, strong listening skills and a desire to help a young person.

Don't have time to be a mentor? There are other ways to nurture foster youth. Perhaps you can share information about your career with a

group of young people. Youth are eager to learn more about various career paths, such as the type of training needed and the skills in-



involved in various jobs; how to get started in the field and the types of opportunities that might be available to them. Another way to help is to invite members on a field trip to your place of employment so they can

learn firsthand what it is like to work in your profession. For more information or to volunteer, contact Shaun Michel at 215-514-3552.

The mentor program also provides parenting classes for pregnant and/or parenting youth, as well as life skills designed to help youth with self-sufficiency and positive child rearing.

For more information on the female mentoring program contact Stephanie Sylvain at 267-514-3551 or via email at ssy-lain@aicenter.us. For more information on the male mentoring program contact Jamal Laidley at 267-514-3550 or via email at jlaidley@aicenter.us.

AIC TO LAUNCH NEW WEB SITE AIPHILLY Will Help Youth Prepare for their Future

Youth aging out of the child welfare system have a new resource at their fingertips! The AIC's new interactive Web site, called *AI Philly*, provides youth with real life tools to help them prepare for their future.

AI Philly offers information about employment and housing opportunities, helps youth link to education, counseling, technology and other resources that are available to them.

The site features success stories

about AI Center youth and enables members to design their own profile page, enter contests, win prizes and share advice with other youth.

It also provides an up-dated calendar where youth can find out about events going on around the City, AI Center workshops and class schedules they can even post their own events.

The site, which will be fully operational in the next few months, can be found at www.aiphilly.com.

Hospitality Training Program (continued)

Participants train 37.5 hours each week for eight weeks. The hours are 7:30 am – 3:30 pm. Monday through Friday. Youth receive a Septa transpass to get to and from the program.

The program, which includes classroom instruction, computer training, as well as on-the-job training, utilizes the National Restaurant Association's ServSafe



training curriculum. Upon graduation participants receive a national food safety certification and are qualified for employment in the hospitality industry.

For more information about this exciting program contact Robert Bell at the Achieving Independence Café at 215-574-0921 or via email at rbell@goodwillnj.org

Top Ten Reason to Refer a Youth To AIC (continued)

4. Free School Supplies:

Youth who enroll in the AIC receive a backpack filled with school supplies.

5. Computer Certification:

AIC offers classes and certification in Web Design and A+ and Microsoft Office programs, which can lead to jobs with competitive salaries.

6. Free admission to sporting events:

The AIC sponsors frequent outings to professional sporting events such as the 76ers, the Phillies and the Flyers. AIC members who are 18 or older have the opportunity to work as vendors at Eagles games at Lincoln Financial Field. Participants receive a meal,

earn \$65 for each game they work and get into the game for free. This program is made possible by Aramark.

7. Free College Placement Testing:

AIC members can take the SAT for free.

8. Assistance in obtaining funding for post secondary education:

AIC can help youth complete the FAFSA application to receive federal financial aid for college or trade school.

9. Stipends:

AIC members are eligible for up to \$2100 in stipends.

10. Educational Assistance:

On-site tutors help youth with problems they have in school.

Supportive Housing Program: Helps Youth in Placement Achieve Independence

Youth enrolled in the AIC are eligible for housing through the Supportive Housing Program (SHP). SHP serves young adults ages 16 – 21 in scattered site apartments throughout the city. Youth can participate in the program for three to 24 months. Services include:

- Rental assistance in a client-leased apartment.
- Emergency funds for food, transportation and clothing.
- Individual life skills counseling in the home and community.
- Life skills and support groups.
- Assistance in developing and completing individualized plans for independence.
- Start-up stipends available to assist in obtaining furnishings for apartment.
- Referrals to other community resources.
- Supportive environment that builds self-esteem and promotes personal growth.

AIC WRAPS UP AN EVENTFUL SUMMER

AIC youth were on the move this summer. Here's a quick recap of some of the exciting events that occurred:

On June 7th, the AIC hosted the second annual Education Recognition and Back Pack Challenge Program. The event recognized 150 foster youth who headed off to an institution of higher education in the summer or fall of 2006. Each youth received a backpack filled with school supplies.



Above: Suzanne Stashak of Arbor Education & Training, Evelyn Busby, director of the Achieving Independence Center; and Ron Spangler of Arbor with some of the backpacks that were distributed.

On June 14th, Members of the AIC's Youth Advisory Board participated in the 2006 AIDS Education Month Prevention Summit. The event was themed Get Tested, Get Treated, Get Active and brought together youth and adults from Philadelphia who are united in their work to prevent the spread of AIDS and support HIV+ members of the community. AIC members, Charday Laverty, Aadam Muhammad, and Jared Wiley participated on a speakers' panel at the event along with Cleopatra Anderson-Wright from DHS. Twelve other AIC members also attended.



Armed with their own digital cameras, the youth got hands-on experience with still photography while receiving instruction in the history and formal elements of photography as an art form. They also

learned to operate a video camera, set up shots, create interesting angles and served as producers and directors conducting personal interviews of Zoe Strauss' friends, colleagues and family members for the documentary. The program is a partnership of the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) at the University of Pennsylvania and the Big Picture Alliance (BPA). For more information visit: <http://zsdocumentary.blogspot.com/>

August 7-11: AIC youth and staff attended the statewide Independent Living Retreat held at Penn State Mont Alto, PA. A number of AIC members participated as co-facilitators developing and enhancing their leadership skills. Additionally, two of the AIC members recorded a theme song for the retreat.

On July 6, seven AIC members participated in the Summer Media Arts Program Collaboration. The youth helped create a documentary about Philadelphia native and self-taught photographer, Zoe Strauss.

Shaheed Days Participates in Operation Understanding

AIC member Shaheed Days was selected to be a participant in the Philadelphia Operation Understanding Program. Operation Understanding is a cross-cultural youth leadership project sponsored by the Urban League and the American Jewish Committee. The mission of the program is to develop a cadre of African American and Jewish leaders who are trained and supported as they address cultural, religious and ethnic issues in the Philadelphia region and beyond. As part of the program, partici-

pants travel to Senegal (West Africa) and Israel, where they gain invaluable knowledge of their respective cultures.

Shaheed, who attends World Communications Charter School, was one of 16 youth selected for the program from a group of more than 45 who applied.

Shaheed and 15 other program participants were in Israel when the conflict between Israel and Hezbollah erupted. The group was safely evacuated and Shaheed shared his experiences with the AIC on August 18, 2006.