

Freedom schools motivate children to succeed

By Marian Wright Edelman

Verneta White has witnessed the good that today's Freedom Schools do in children's lives.

She recalls the troubled little boy whose behavior problems kept her and the rest of the staff at the Mt. Pleasant Freedom School in Kansas City, Mo., busier than normal in the summer of 1995. His mother struggled with drug addiction, and he didn't

always get the supervision at home that children his age need. "We always had to tell him to please quit that, please sit, please read. We wondered if we were getting through," says White, who has served as a Freedom School intern for the past two years.

This summer, says White, the boy's mother didn't get the notice that Freedom School was

starting, but he came back on his own. "He told me he came back because someone cares," she says. "He made the effort to come back to where something positive was happening. And he really wants to read."

More than 1,400 children in low-income communities in 10 states and the District of Columbia found wholesome education, recreation, and nutrition at 27 Freedom Schools this summer. (Some Freedom Schools continue as after-school programs during the school year.) Inspired by the Freedom Schools created in the South during the civil rights movement, the six-to-eight-week summer program, sponsored by the Black Community Crusade for Children, was developed in 1992. The schools are designed to be both fun and educational, with lots of reading and supervised play. Nutritious meals and snacks are provided by the USDA Summer Food Service Program. Parents are encouraged to participate.

In addition, children are taught how to resolve their disagreements in constructive ways. The interns help the children, who range in age from five through 18, think about the consequences of violence and the benefits of nonviolent

alternatives.

Freedom Schools are staffed by a dedicated corps of 200 college students and college-age young adults. These young people, some of whom are members of the Black Student Leadership Network, are trained each summer at the Ella Baker Child Policy Training Institute housed at the former farm of author Alex Haley, in Clinton, Tenn. The interns say their hard work is richly rewarded by the changes they see in the children who come to the Freedom Schools.

The children's grades "went up tremendously," says Walter McDonald, who served as a intern in the Mt. Pleasant Freedom School in 1995 and 1996. During the past school year, he and other interns kept in touch with some of the children through cards and letters, encouraging them to do well in school. This year, those children "feel pretty good about themselves," says McDonald. "They gain self-esteem from the way we carry ourselves and the way we talk to them and tell them they're somebody. We have career days, get them thinking about becoming a doctor or a teacher."

For most of the children, this is the first time they've known

Halfway houses

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dominant power structure. The Southern majority will never rest if it thinks the best of anything vital to it prevails under predominantly Black control. It will use any means to make the best available for the use of itself and its children.

3. Some Black colleges have teachers with "weak" credentials. Some Black teachers, along with whites, have the academically meaningless "honorary" degree or the questionable and paid-for degree from "universities without walls." Some are posturing, political protégés protected by obligated politicians.

4. The continuation of state support for colleges catering to any racial or religious group violates the letter and spirit of the Constitution, its civil rights protections, amendments and decisions made through test of High Court argumentation.

5. Black leadership has been pitifully weak, having failed terribly in Haiti, Somalia, Liberia, and Nigeria.

One strong point, however, is that these colleges could be used as educational "services stations" dispensing help to redeem talented, "at risk" and other inner-city youth through college training, on-the-job training and part-time jobs, thereby steering them toward productive citizenship.

someone who is in college, says Shyree Holmes-Leverett, site coordinator at Mt. Pleasant. "They start to say, 'I want to go to college.' One of our seventh-graders, from a single-parent home, realizes her mother won't be able to afford college, and has begun asking about scholarships."

Even the youngest children develop new confidence. "We make them so comfortable," says White, who is majoring in pre-med at Kansas State University. "Once the children are comfortable with the Freedom School routine, they take the

books as a challenge. It's not 'We gotta read again,' it's 'Let's read!'"

According to Holmes-Leverett, "Freedom School consumes you, but it's not as if you don't want it. A wonderful relationship develops between a child and someone who is older but is not a parent."

And it's those relationships that explain the powerful impact Freedom Schools have on both the staff and the children.

For information on how your child-serving agency can sponsor a Freedom School, how

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Hilton

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Public Service: Society looks to the academic community not only for information and advice, but in many cases for actual execution and administration of programs.

Some public services are performed by faculty in connection with their teaching and research, such as the operation of farms, dairies, hotels, restaurants, and other enterprises related to instruction.

Institutional Governance and Operations: Faculties, individually and collectively, usually occupy a prominent role in the policies, decisions, and ongoing activities at colleges and universities.

For example, curriculum matters are dealt with through the curriculum committee and faculty concerns are handled by the academic senate. One additional governance body also functions on many campuses and that is the union.

Instruction: Instructing or teaching is the overwhelming preference of most faculty. Many, if not, most professors agree that teaching effectiveness, not publications, should be the primary criterion for promotion.

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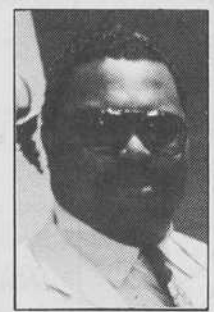


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