



# Top 20, Inc.

Putting Positive Choices In Motion



Newsletter – September 2015

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In conjunction with School City of East Chicago (SCEC), the Board Members of Top 20, Inc. continue our efforts to work with girls at the middle and high school levels through three inter-related programmatic priorities: mentoring, community service, and dance training. As organizations commonly do, we embraced opportunities and dealt with challenges, each of which makes us determined to meet our ultimate goal: **to enable teenage girls to make positive life choices.**



Top 20 Inc. Board members Linda Velasco, Debra Williams, and Bette Wilson discuss implementation with Parent Liaison Kimberly Pollard.

During the 2014-15 school year those three components—mentoring, community, dance—drove us to interact with other organizations equally interested in the wellbeing of children in East Chicago and elsewhere. This past year we had opportunities to meet with newly assigned individuals of School Administration, **Dr. Youssef Yomtoob**-Superintendent (affectionately known as Dr. Joe), **Mrs. Shaunna Finley**-Principal of Central High School, and most recently, **Dr. Paige McNulty**-Assistant Superintendent. We were also introduced to Parent Liaison **Kimberly Pollard**, who has worked in this position for more than 20 years and has an excellent rapport with the girls.

## Mentoring

Our board was advised to combine forces with **Communities In Schools of Lake County (CIS)**, whose mission is to surround students with a community of support empowering them to stay in school and achieve in life. CIS Executive Director **Patricia Simes** and her team has been an active partner with SCEC for close to a decade providing various educational programs and services. Some of our Top 20 II participants were able to take part in those activities.

Top 20 provided an after school enrichment program as part of the mentoring service, and participants from CIS were encouraged to join for a fun experience. We



Dance instructors Brianna Ursery & Davonna Edwards

offered dance training Monday through Thursday for one hour. High school girls danced on Mondays and Tuesdays at Central, while the younger girls danced at their respective schools on Wednesdays at West Side Middle School and Thursdays at Block Middle School. The dance classes were instructed by Brianna Ursery (graduate of Howard University) and Davonna Edwards (graduate of Columbia College, Chicago).

## Community Service

**Pastor Dwayne Davis** of **St. Mark AME Zion Church** is the coordinator of an ongoing food distribution ministry that convenes the 3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday of every month. His demonstration of diligence to serve others is incredibly inspiring. Word gets around when one consistently does good things for others, expecting nothing in return, and that was reason enough for us on three occasions (January 17, February 21, and May 17, 2015) to have Top 20 II participants join the ranks of those who know the power of selflessness.



Top 20 II participants prepare to serve breakfast at St. Mark Church

Pastor Dwayne and the fine people of St. Mark lead by example and we could not have been more proud of our young ladies who followed suit by graciously serving the guests during the breakfast period and, with little direction, helping to clean up afterwards. Immediately following breakfast, recipients lined up and signed in with Top 20, Inc. Board Members who also served by bagging food items for those in need to take home to their families.



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## Dance



Instructor Brittany Kelley & Top 20 II Saturday dance program

Mentioned earlier, the CIS After School Enrichment Program provided opportunities for the girls to dance, but that was a separate program from our original **Top 20 II Saturday program**. Many of the girls from all three schools participated on Saturdays, and most of those were from West Side and Block Middle Schools. The Saturday dance classes were instructed by Brittany Kelley (graduate of Indiana State University) who has been with us for two years.

Included under the dance category, we have rewarded the girls since our inception by taking them on field trips to professionally known dance companies such as the Joffrey Ballet and Alvin Ailey, and this school year was no different. **On February 5, 2015 the West Indian Dance Theatre, founded by Mr. Alfred Baker performed at the Indiana University Northwest**

**Campus for its Black History Month celebration.** Mr. Baker and his assistant Vickie Casanova worked with Top 20 II in 2014 at our summer workshop, so a few of the girls were familiar with his company, which exhibits wonderful sounds of melodic drums and rhythmic dancing heavily influenced by African



Vickie Casanova, West Ind. Dance Co. & Iris Rosa, IU

cultures. The girls were pleasantly surprised and encouraged to see two of their peers from Central High School also performing with Mr. Baker's dance company.

Another performance was held that same evening by the **African American Dance Company of Indiana University's Bloomington Campus, under the direction of Professor Iris Rosa, former Washington High School alumna and Top 20 student.** Ms. Rosa has

an extraordinary background in the studies of the African Diaspora. She has contributed more than 40 years of dance instruction to students at IU, and assisted in the preparation of our **Student Handbook**.

Our final field trip for the school year was exceptional for one specific reason—Top 20 II participants were privileged to actually take part in a basic fundamental modern dance class, as well as a hip-hop class at **Lou Conte Dance Company housed in the famed Hubbard Street Dance Center in Chicago on May 30, 2015.** This experience is something we would like to do more often as the hands-on training at professional companies in Chicago was super exciting for the girls.

## Bring A Friend Day

Bring A Friend Day is an annual event where Top 20 II participants invite their peers and family members. It allows others to see what the girls have been up to and serves as a recruiting endeavor as well. **This year's event, held on March 28, 2015,** was a combination of participants from the CIS After School Program and the Top 20 II Saturday dance classes. While demonstrating what the girls have learned is the main objective, this occasion also focuses on the parents who attend, as we believe their input is crucial in terms of finding ways to motivate their daughters positively.

This time, each of our dance instructors was assigned to do solo improvisations and they performed beautifully, as was expected. It is important for Top 20 II participants to observe dance levels that can be achieved through consistent practice and hard work. Immediately following the solo performances by instructors Brittany, Brianna and Davonna, we challenged some of the girls to perform a routine they had been practicing on their own. They mustered up the courage to show their peers and us what they could do, and were commended for their performance. It was a good day.

As we carry on the tradition of **Mildred M. Ball** to aid in the development of girls in the East Chicago Public School system, we will continue to share our accomplishments with all of our gracious donors. On behalf of the Top 20, Inc. Board of Directors, **THANKS** for your prayers and continued financial support.

*Have a fantastic fall season!*