

**"Kids live up, or down, to expectations."  
-Mae Jemison**

### *Draw a Scientist*

In 1957, two anthropologists did a nationwide study to examine how 35,000 high school students from a range of backgrounds viewed a specific occupation, a scientist. Students were asked to draw their idea of what a scientist looked like and guess what? Almost all the boys and girls drew a white male with glasses and a lab coat. Over 60 years later, unfortunately, some might say that very little has changed.

It's become apparent that children need to see someone who looks like them as role models; they need to see someone who reflects their experience to give them a path that they too can follow. Jump now to the 2000s, when psychologist Sabrina Zirkel surveyed 80 sixth and seventh-graders over two-year period of time and concluded that, "Race- and gender-matched role models provide concrete information to young people regarding what is possible for them as members of specific social groups." Kids need to see Misty Copeland dance to know they can be the principal dancer for the American Ballet Theatre or they need to hear the story of NASA mathematician Katharine Johnson to understand that they too can reach for the stars.

The New York Urban League understands the importance of leading by example and that is why for over eight years they have been allowing young women and men to visit leaders in the community and learn from the very best in their fields in what NYUL deems Empowerment Day!

### *Young Women's Empowerment Day*

Each year, almost 300 young women and men in high school, visit one of our 'empowerment sites' to explore careers throughout New York City. Arva Rice, President of the NYUL shares its inception, "The idea really is our souped-up version of 'take your daughter to work day,' she continues, "and rather than taking one daughter, or one son, we take 150 girls and 150 boys to these empowerment sites to go to work for the day."

These sites can be in fields including business and government, as well as sports and entertainment. Locations of past visits include Yankee Stadium, NBA, Google, Microsoft, L'Oréal and Viacom. As exciting as the venues have been, the speakers who have stepped up to share their work are just as impressive, including famed TV Producer Mara

Brock Akil and comedic actress Kim Cole, as well as Viacom Executive Marva Smalls and the legendary singer Mary J. Blige.

Rice explains, "The idea is that we give these young people an opportunity to walk into doors that they might not normally have access. These aren't the usual places that their parents work, at all, and so this is an opportunity for them to see new places but also see faces that look like their own and thriving in these environments."

### *Open More Doors*

The Urban League is hoping to expand this program and many others with their Civil Rights 2.0 initiative which will raise 1.5 million dollars to be distributed to the areas of education, employment and advocacy. Through the education branch of this vital tree, the league plans to open the Empowerment Day program to more participants and with a much more formalized mentoring component.

Rice explains their goals for expansion, "First, we would love to have 500 girls take over the City, shadowing not only corporate but more government officials as well. Black women remain underrepresented in elected offices, at all levels, and if young women can see themselves in those roles, then they can be setting the policies that improve the lives of everyone."

Rice also discusses a more one-on-one approach which would allow young women a direct mentor to guide them, "We would pair girls with some of the women they have met during Empowerment Days, as well as members of our Young Professionals, who can help shape their next set of choices and help them meet their goals over the course of the years to come."

Finally, Rice hopes that an expansion of the Empowerment Program would allow them to create more workshops to prepare young people for the work they will be doing that week. Rice adds, "It would be less of a one day event, and more of a preparation prior to the office visit with a post-day workshop to follow through on what they learned." More than opening the door, NYUL wants to create a map for their participant's journey moving forward.

### *Looking Back, to Look Ahead*

Rice reflects on the ultimate goal for these young women, "We want girls to feel like they can dream outside of their square block from where they live; that they can see beyond what is familiar and open their eyes to possibilities and opportunities they never dreamed of."

When asked who Arva Rice looks to in history for inspiration, "I would definitely say Harriet Tubman because she kept going back. She got her freedom and she kept going back

for more and more and more people. And as she said: she would have freed more people if only they had known that they were slaves."

The idea that you are limited only by your experience – by what you know; what you've seen or been taught is prevalent in the mission of the NYUL. The League strives to show people worlds outside their own experience; to open the doors of possibility for as many members of the community as they can manage, but they cannot manage alone.