

Youth Civic Engagement Project A Success



Dr. Baker & Cedric Mitchell with interns Keena Flie & Idocia Perry and students Zaleem Allen, Joshua Burns, Tramayne Davis, Wilbert Brown, Rory Owens, Collier-Parks Erick, Dakari Franklin, Nicholas Jones, Steven Smith, Joshua Akbar, Kyle Burton, Brandon Rice

The Barat Education Foundation and the Paul Simon Public Policy Institute at Southern Illinois University Carbondale (SIU-C) joined with Community Concepts, Inc and the East St. Louis Chapters of Alpha Phi Alpha, Kappa Alpha Psi, Omega Psi Phi, the Boy Scouts, Top Ladies of Distinction, and the Gateway Chapter of the LINKS, Inc. to offer a ten-week Saturday afternoon project that focuses on community engagement and civic participation. Students, who have been meeting at The Village Theater in Centreville, have one more week to complete the program locally.

“Commitment and collaboration have made this project happen,” explained SIU-C professor Dr. Linda Renee Baker. “Without the full support and involvement of the community groups, the Barat Foundation would not have selected the metro east area for a pilot project. Particularly helpful in ensuring the success of the pilot were two representatives: Ms. Gwen Key from the Gateway Chapter of the LINKS, Inc. and Mr. Cedric Mitchell from Omega Psi Phi. Our facilitator, Ms. Christina Fisher from Community Concepts, was also crucial to the effort as she knows the beat and pulse of our area youth through her community art and theater activities.”

The civic engagement project is grounded in the design of Our American Voice, a Department of Education funded pilot program administered by the Barat Education Foundation. Its purpose is to help students learn about the fundamentals of our democratic society in the context of community involvement. The metro east project is the only one operating outside of the Chicago metropolitan area.

During the past nine consecutive Saturdays, students have come together to learn about the workings of government and the importance of each citizen through stories, activities, discussions and research. While they enjoyed many speakers, the remarks and give-and-take with Senator James Clayborn was a highlight. In addition to stressing the program’s themes, the Senator spoke about the importance of self-responsibility in an informed active citizenry.

As a team, the students identified and have been working on a local project about changing attitudes to enhance civic engagement among young people. They have conducted on-line research and interviewed local leaders and community organizations. One product of their efforts is a multi-media presentation to document their work and report to their schools and communities. At the conclusion of the school year, a sampling of the civic engagement project youth will travel to Chicago to participate in a forum with students from other pilot sites to present their video and share their passion for making the world a better place.

“We are extremely proud of the young men in our Saturday program and must extend a special thanks to the parents for their commitment to the participation of their children in this project,” said Ms. Fisher. “All of the other Barat Foundation pilots are associated with after school programs that have a ‘captive audience’. Our parents had to put forth that extra effort, and they did.”



(L to r) Gwen Keys, Christina Fisher, Shaka Mitchell, Dr. Linda Baker, Cedric Mitchell



Students doing our American Voice survey on-line with Keena and Idocia looking on.