

DHS
MAKING
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IMPACT

Despite the struggles against poverty, drugs, violence and crime that youth in some of our communities face, there are positive impacts being made all over Allegheny County to encourage at-risk youth to stay on a path leading to a fulfilling, productive life.

Many of these positive impacts are being made by KEYS (Knowledge to Empower Youth to Success) Service Corps, an AmeriCorps program run out of the DHS Office of Community Services (OCS). KEYS serves at-risk youth by providing safe places with structured activities and assistance with homework and class work, implementing community service/service-learning projects, and involving community volunteers in service.

Whether serving part-time or full-time terms, KEYS members create positive impacts and develop significant bonds and relationships with youth served by the programs. Each year, there are more than 130 KEYS members serving the various community needs within Allegheny County.



KEYS



Kimmy Miller is one of the many KEYS members who has positively impacted youth. Her story about her role in influencing Steve, a youth at the Braddock Youth Project (BYP), is especially inspiring and serves as a solid example of the difference KEYS members can make for a youth.

Kimmy Miller served with KEYS for two years and worked with the Braddock Youth Project (BYP), teaching video production and mentoring and tutoring participating youth.

The Braddock community has seen both good and bad times, and programs like BYP help to bring together the community and unite people that might not otherwise work together.

“No one wants to live in a town that’s falling apart,” Miller said. “No one wants to live in a town where there is violence and drugs. Programs like BYP give youth something to do that’s constructive and will make an impact on the whole community. We plant gardens, create mosaics, create videos with positive messages and mentor and tutor kids in the community. What happens in Braddock, doesn’t stay in Braddock, it affects all of Allegheny County and beyond. It’s all connected.”

Marc Cherna
Director

Allegheny County Department of Human Services



Dan Onorato
Allegheny County Executive

While working with BYP, she met Steve, a youth interested in video production. Steve decided to get involved with BYP after meeting a few of the project's mentors in the community and ended up interning with Miller for two summers.

"Before I met Steve, everyone always talked about how great of a young man he was," said Miller. "I remember when I finally met him I couldn't stop thinking about how nice, soft-spoken and extraordinarily polite he was."

Together, he and Miller would work on videos for BYP and for Steve's high school classes. Miller appreciated his eagerness and willingness to learn video production skills and techniques and even spend extra hours to complete projects.

Miller joined KEYS with the anticipation of making a difference and helping others. She eventually realized that working with KEYS changed her life as much as it changed the lives of the youth she worked with.

"Working with KEYS was the most meaningful experience of my life," said Miller. "I went into it hoping to save the world and instead the program saved me. It brought meaning to my life and gave me a reason to be excited to go to work each day. There is no greater payment than seeing youth smile and accomplish things they thought were impossible."

Steve agrees that KEYS and programs like BYP are extremely beneficial to communities.



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-Kimmy

"It really makes for a rewarding experience for those who want to be involved in the community because you are helping to shape the lives of young people," said Steve. "KEYS has an astronomically amazing effect on communities."

Miller ultimately hopes that her work has helped positively influence Steve and other youth she encountered during her time with KEYS. With Steve, she hopes her relationship with him helped him gain confidence and pursue higher education.

"I hope that I helped shape his love of video production and helped give him the extra push to pursue college,"

"Kimmy was always so professional and I really respected her knowledge for video editing," said Steve. "It really made me want to learn more and do more because I knew the BYP videos we created could make a difference to other youth in the community."

With the help of Miller, Steve was able to develop and fine tune his video production skills. Steve would sometimes even teach the video production workshops on his own, but no matter how accomplished his skills became, he still always appreciated Miller's advice.

"Through BYP I learned to be more receptive to advice and suggestions," said Steve. "I wasn't that good at video editing at first, so I really needed the help. As I got better, sometimes Kimmy would even ask me for my feedback. It really made me feel like I was on the right track, going in the right direction."

said Miller. "There were times I saw his eyes light up with excitement when I taught him something new, and I hope he continues to explore and learn new things that similarly excite and interest him."

Today, Steve, who is now a student in college, agrees that his experience with Miller and BYP have helped shape the person he is today.

"The relationship I had with Kimmy was definitely a positive influence on my life," said Steve. "I really believe Kimmy and BYP helped me develop into a more professional individual and without Kimmy, I wouldn't be where I am today with my love and knowledge of video production. I'm forever thankful to her for that."

To learn more about KEYS, please visit the DHS website at: www.alleghenycounty.us/dhs/KEYS/index.html.