

Rosemary Deane: ESL Teacher/Family Support Specialist, New Hope Elementary

Harlem Children's Zone Visit Reflection

5/15/15

I listened intently as a middle aged man born and raised in Harlem recounted his story. He was about 14 years old, gambling with friends on the street corner, when a young man came by and opened fire. As bullets whizzed by he ran for cover with his best friend trailing right behind him. A moment later he turned and watched as his friend fell to the ground, his life stolen from him. That moment changed his entire life's trajectory. He decided to take his life into his own hands before someone else took it from him. He agreed to participate in programs offered to him by the staff of the Harlem Children's Zone (HCZ), ones he had previously turned down. He pursued his education and a career in graphic design and now, years later, he leads and supports youth in Harlem and serves as an HCZ director. His story is not unique; the Harlem Children's Zone has supported thousands of young people, leading them to success and saving many lives in many different ways. A number of their participants return to the HCZ family to guide young people in their community and to support their caregivers from conception through college and into their career! Their work is incredibly inspiring and crucial to the success of their community, our nation, and even the world. As Martin Luther King Jr.'s words remind us, "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

Though many of the children living in poverty in Orange County NC may not be dodging bullets from a handgun, they are constantly trying to dodge the bullets of discrimination, limited access to resources, opportunities, and support, and numerous other pitfalls that are inherent in a life of poverty. They fall further and further behind, beginning to lose all hope for a brighter future. Their parents desperately want what's best for them, but lack the resources, knowledge, and support to help them break the cycle of poverty and rise above the challenges they face.

Hearing about the incredible work that has taken place in Harlem filled me with awe, inspiration, hope, and lots of wonderful ideas for how we can transform our own community and the future communities our children will impact throughout the world. Will it take hard work? Yes. Money? Yes. Time, commitment, and passion? Yes. Will it all be worth it? YES! Investing in our children, is investing in our future. Helping them to navigate the system, gain access to knowledge and resources, pursue their passions, and face whatever obstacles society throws their way, will lead to the creation of a more thoughtful, creative, hardworking, and just society. It will save the lives of numerous children and the future of this planet.