



YMCA of the USA

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YMCA National Black Achievers Program

REACHING AND SERVING ALL PEOPLE OF COLOR



BLACK ACHIEVERS describes the origin and mission of the program. Today, however, the program includes all teens of color at YMCAs nationwide. Local program names may vary, such as Black & Hispanic Achievers or Minority Achievers.

History

QUENTIN MEASE first conceived the YMCA Black Achievers program at the South Central YMCA in 1967 under the label Young Black Achievers of Houston. The program was designed to motivate African-American teens to academic and career success. In 1971, New York YMCA Financial Consultant Leo B. Marsh challenged the Harlem branch to develop a new motivational program, initiating the Black Achievers format we know today.

The new program fostered ongoing interaction between African-American youth and adults who had distinguished themselves in their professions. After the Harlem launch of the Black Achievers program, this successful career development/academic achievement initiative spread quickly to YMCAs nationwide. Today, Black Achievers continues to grow in both urban and suburban communities of all sizes with more than 200 active programs nationwide.

The YMCA Black Achievers program is a national college readiness program designed to help African-American and other teens of color set and pursue high educational and career goals. Through academic support, career exploration and mentoring, YMCA Black Achievers programs help youth raise their academic standards, develop a positive sense of self, build character, explore diverse college and career options, and meet and interact with professionals of color who serve as role models to inspire them to greater heights.

THE PROGRAM involves nearly 200 YMCAs, including 18 programs that serve primarily Hispanic/Latino youth and families. Achievers programs at local YMCAs have directed more than \$19 million to scholarships for youth and engaged more than 25,000 volunteers through networks of corporate and community partners. YMCA Black Achievers programs serve all youth of color, and many YMCAs have added new cultural, academic and leadership programming to serve a broad range of youth and families.

Why we need Black Achievers

Education statistics show that high school and college drop-out rates are higher among African-American and Hispanic students compared to their Caucasian

“The Y is the best thing any kid can have to help them grow and understand what life really is, so the Black Achievers is a bridge that’s in it to help them.”

Barry Harris, Teen Achievers,
Harlem YMCA, New York, New York

counterparts. Research also shows that teens are more motivated to succeed academically when encouraged and guided by adults who are successful and who look like them. The YMCA Black Achievers program addresses these issues by pairing students with successful role models of color and providing academic and career-related mentoring and support services.

How the program works

YMCA Black Achievers is built on the notion that community and corporate involvement are critical to building networks and opportunities for youth. To that end, the program centers on the relationship established between volunteer mentors and youth during career clusters. Clusters are workshops dedicated to specific areas of professional interest. Youth participants and mentors, who are experts in their fields, complete projects that are designed to provide students an opportunity to explore their career interests through real-life application of skills. Career clusters include: Arts and Humanities, Business, Communications, Computers, Education, Engineering, Health and Medical, Law and Government, as well as Vocational and Technical disciplines.

YMCA Black Achievers Goals

- Raise academic standards of youth of color
- Assist youth of color in gaining acceptance to institutions of higher learning
- Expose youth of color to diverse career options
- Provide minority adult role models to inspire youth of color to set and achieve personal and professional goals
- Help youth of color develop a positive sense of self
- Build character and develop positive assets in youth of color
- Create channels for continuing community involvement by business and industry

Teens in YMCA Black Achievers programs are:

- Motivated to succeed in school and gain marketable skills
- Empowered to pursue advanced education
- Inspired to develop their talents and leadership abilities
- Exposed to the culture and expectations of the workplace
- Engaged in mentoring relationships

Each local YMCA program is unique and may include a variety of other college prep and leadership development activities, such as workshops on SAT/ACT preparation; study skills/time management; interviewing techniques; financial management; team-building field trips; community service-learning projects; and college tours. Programs may meet at the YMCA, churches, schools, colleges/universities or local businesses.

The Achievers program strongly incorporates the building of the Abundant Assets—40 critical factors for the successful growth and development of young people. The assets clearly show the important roles that families, schools, congregations, neighborhoods, youth organizations and others in communities play in shaping young people's lives.

"I was part of the first Black Achievers group in Sarasota, FL. After earning a Bachelors of Science degree in Psychology, I became a volunteer cluster leader of the Middle School Youth Achievers program. Although I relocated, I continue to serve the Black Achievers program on the Steering committee and have launched my own non profit organization dedicated to youth. I AM a product of the Black Achievers program."

**Elexia Coleman-Moss,
Sarasota Achievers Alumni**

Who participates?

YMCA Black Achievers is open to youth in middle and/or high schools, from all social, economic and academic levels. The only true requirement a youth must have to enroll in the program is the desire to achieve.

Adults of color also benefit from this program. Each year, corporations, businesses and organizations nominate successful role models in professional and managerial positions who are honored at an awards event. Thanks to the opportunity for leadership roles in the YMCA Black Achievers program, adults can gain visibility within their local YMCA boards and companies, helping them to advance professionally and within their community.

Programs that have been in existence for quite some time now reap the benefits of past teen achievers who return to give back to a program that gave so much to them. Many past teen achievers have been honored as adult achievers. They also volunteer as cluster leaders, serve on local and corporate YMCA boards and hold key positions within the YMCA, such as the position of Black Achievers Director. Finally, because of their participation and networking with adult volunteers, many past teen achievers have attained high profile positions within the corporate and business community.



“The YMCA Black Achievers helped me to understand what I needed to know to become a successful African-American architect or engineer with strong roots, not only in my community, but in the world too...To hear the words of encouragement from those who have traveled the path I am about to travel, or to go visit engineers and architects who look like me and are successful like I want to be...”

Cipeo Alexander Walker, Teen Achiever,
James Weldon Johnson YMCA,
Jacksonville, Florida

New initiatives

The YMCA Black Achievers program seeks to position itself as a top leader in changing the lives of youth and teens of color. By 2008, Black Achievers endeavors to double the number of Hispanic Achievers programs and increase local YMCA participation by 30 percent. New initiatives include:

Collegiate Achievers Program—

This program will serve as a bridge to the college campus community for its adult, teen and college-aged participants. College students will continue to receive support, career guidance, education and applicable experience to aid in fulfilling their long-term personal and professional goals. In addition, the program will foster the culture of “giving back” as students mentor their younger teen achievers partners at local area YMCA Black Achievers programs.

National Adult Achiever of the Year Award—

This award will recognize a national leader for outstanding commitment and accomplishment in their field of expertise and to the betterment of humankind.

The YMCA Black Achievers program reaches into the heart of the community for both its adults and teen achievers. By recognizing and utilizing the talents of successful adults, the program brings a much-needed positive influence into the lives of young people.



Due to improved academic achievement and the availability of corporate and college scholarships, our youth proudly enter the doors of prominent colleges and universities. Teens increasingly compete in all academic areas, because a caring adult took the time to assist them in reading, writing, math and science. Youth prepare for many opportunities that await them in business, technology, medicine, education, engineering, law and government. But just as important, they are taught the benefits of networking, setting goals and civic engagement.

The YMCA Black Achievers program is making a tremendous impact in the African-American and Hispanic/Latino communities across the YMCA movement by connecting positive and caring minority adult role models with minority youth. It is a program that truly lives up to the YMCA's national theme: “We Build Strong Kids, Strong Families, Strong Communities.”

