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Arlington At-Risk Students Beat the Odds to Graduate from High School and Head to College

(Arlington, VA) – Despite steep economic and cultural challenges, nine at-risk students have beaten the odds and are planning to graduate from Arlington high schools. Eight of the nine are headed to college – a milestone their parents never experienced.

The students' families are from around the world, and their stories illustrate remarkable journeys of individual perseverance and nurturing community support.

Here are just a few:



- Maria, originally from El Salvador, came to the U.S. in 2007. In just two years, she has overcome significant language and cultural challenges to achieve a 3.5 grade point average. Inspired by doctors who visited her rural village, she hopes to become a pediatrician and set up a clinic for families who can't afford medical care. Accepted by several universities, Maria has chosen to attend NOVA next year to save money and stay close to home.
- Aneela's family moved to the United States from Kashmir when she was two. She is one of those amazing youngsters – a natural leader, dedicated volunteer and committed student. She has worked hard to fulfill her dream of going to college. She averaged a 4.0 grade point average throughout high school and earned a full scholarship to Virginia Tech.
- Raaga immigrated to the United States from the Sudan as a young child. She spoke no English and learned most of her language skills by listening and watching others. She has worked hard to achieve personal and academic success, and has become a role model for other children in her community. Next fall she is attending Mary Washington University.

As different as their personal stories are, all of these youth have one thing in common; they participated in comprehensive education programs located in the affordable apartment complexes where they live.

Designed to help low-income students stay in school and maximize their potential, AHC Inc.'s onsite programs provide ongoing support through after-school programs, teen tutoring, and partnerships like Project Discovery, a Virginia initiative that encourages first generation or economically disadvantaged teens to stay in school and prepare for college.

The formula is working. Recently AHC held a celebration for the high school seniors in its teen program. One hundred percent of the students expect to graduate – far above the statewide dropout rates for minority students. “Despite substantial obstacles such as learning a whole new language and culture, each of these students has shown tremendous courage and determination to reach academic success,” said Jennifer Endo, AHC’s Director of Resident Services.

Consistent, one-on-one support is the key ingredient. Because AHC’s programs are offered onsite in the communities where students live, managers get to know families well over the years, and can help them through language, social and academic challenges whenever needed. “We believe education is the key to changing a life,” explains Joy Rambert, AHC’s Resident Services Senior Manager. “To help our students succeed, we give them a consistent message – try to achieve your personal best and we will support you every step of the way, from elementary on up. “

This year’s graduating senior class comes from around the world, including Ethiopia, El Salvador, Kashmir, and Nepal. Their aspirations are wide ranging as well. Several hope to become doctors; others are interested in engineering or accounting.

Photo: AHC Inc. celebrates graduating high school seniors who participated in AHC’s comprehensive Teen Programs, including Virginia’s Project Discovery initiative, designed to help students stay in school and maximize their potential. AHC, a nonprofit affordable housing developer based in Arlington, provides onsite educational programs for families and children.

Back row, left to right: Aneela Mousam, Maria Cristela Platero, Nisha Chauhan, Selam Wubante, Kelecha Nabil; *Front row, left to right:* Ragaa Abdul Moniem, Ana Rosales, Hilewna Gebru.

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AHC Inc. is a private, nonprofit developer of low- and moderate-income housing in Arlington, Virginia. Founded in 1975, AHC produces and preserves affordable rental housing; provides homeownership services; and offers onsite educational services to improve the quality of residents’ lives.

Project Discovery is a dropout prevention program and college access preparatory program offered through 21 Partner Agencies in Virginia. Serving economically disadvantaged, potential first-generation post-secondary education attendees, the program is designed to promote education as a means to ending the cycle of poverty for our current and future generations of students.