

South Florida network helps guide young leaders

A program that's new to South Florida is linking student leaders with top colleges and universities.

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By Kathleen McGrory

Tashane Campbell, 18, is a little bit anxious about going to college 1,500 miles from home. But he knows he'll have his posse, nine other student leaders from Miami-Dade County who will be going to Hamilton College with him.

"We've become like one person," said Tashane, who attends Miami Norland Senior High School. "I know that anytime I need them, they'll always be there for me."

Thirty student leaders from Miami-Dade are receiving full scholarships to one of three prestigious colleges: the University of Pennsylvania, Mount Holyoke in Massachusetts and Hamilton College in upstate New York. They also get mentoring and support, both here in Miami and from a diverse network of young professionals nationwide. Thank the Posse Foundation.

The foundation is new to Miami-Dade, but it's had a national presence for more than two decades. Students are selected for Posse scholarships based on their leadership skills and potential -- not necessarily their SAT scores and GPA. They usually come from diverse backgrounds that reflect the community.

Once chosen, the scholarship recipients are grouped into "posses" of 10 students. Each posse attends the same college. The students spend the eight months before college preparing for the college academic experience -- and becoming a strong team. The goal: to create a support network before they even arrive on campus.

LEADERSHIP

Posse founder Deborah Bial says the program is about more than broadening college access.

"The ultimate goal is to create a new kind of leadership network in the United States, one that better represents the real diversity in our cities," she said.

Since 1989, Posse has placed more than 3,000 students at top colleges and universities, including Vanderbilt in Tennessee, Middlebury in Vermont and the University of California Berkeley.

About 90 percent of Posse scholars earn at least a bachelor's degree. Before this year, Posse had a presence in six major U.S. cities. Bial was looking to expand.

“Florida made a lot of sense,” she said. “Miami has a large public school system. We knew a lot of kids would be great candidates for Posse.”

Miami-Dade Superintendent Alberto Carvalho signed on in July. (Broward County is not involved with the program).

This year has been a banner year for the Posse Foundation. In addition to expanding, Posse was among the 10 organizations chosen by President Barack Obama to receive a portion of his \$1.4 million Nobel Peace Prize award money. It's been equally as exciting a year for the Posse scholars in Miami.

TRAINING

The scholars have been hard at work preparing for college. Their training includes intensive writing workshops and team-building activities.

“Sometimes, it's difficult to get to the training because I'm so busy at school,” said Jessica Moulite, a senior at North Miami Beach Senior High who is also going to Hamilton. “But it's totally worth it.”

Alejandra Muñoz, who attends Ferguson Senior High and will enroll at the University of Pennsylvania, said she has learned how to relate to students from diverse backgrounds.

“We're all so different, and we've learned so much about each other,” she said. “It's kind of amazing.”

Tashane said the experience has been life-changing.

“I keep thinking, ‘I'm really going to make something of myself,’” he said. “This is my chance.”