

Staff Reflections:

In an effort to go beyond simply reporting on dollars and details, President Rick Smith asked members of the Pinkerton staff to reflect on a moment, great or small, during the year that reminded them why they love the work we do. Their reports:

Laurie Dien, Senior Program Officer: An initiative of the Center for Economic Opportunity in both the Bloomberg and DeBlasio administrations, **Project Rise (Pinkerton grants of \$1.2 million over four years)** creates new pathways to stability for out-of-school/out-of-work young people through High School Equivalency (HSE) preparation, paid internships, and wrap-around social services. During a visit to one Project Rise classroom at Kingsborough Community College, I couldn't help but think how unlikely it was to see these at-risk young people on a college campus. Along with the 400 other Project Rise participants, they were there studying for their HSE exams while also gaining direct and supervised work experience. At a table with program staff we asked three participants what they had achieved. One young man said he didn't have achievements yet. Puzzled, we gently challenged him. Hadn't he just been hired, full-time, by his internship site? And wasn't he well on his way to his academic goal as well? I said those were accomplishments indeed. As we spoke his eyes welled up with tears. His life clearly hadn't been marked by many moments of pride or achievement. And although the staff said they try to celebrate various milestones during the program, it sometimes took the words of an outsider to help the young people really believe how far they'd come.

Julie Peterson, Senior Program Officer: **You Gotta Believe (\$100,000)** is a program that focuses on finding permanent adoptive families for teens in foster care. On a wintry Saturday afternoon, I attended a remarkable meeting between several young people in care and a room full of prospective parents. Led by a moderator who was herself adopted relatively late in life, the teens talked about their chaotic lives (each had at least four, and up to fourteen, different foster placements) and posed questions to the audience. In turn, the adults—a diverse group that included single men and women, married women couples and several African American families with children -- asked how they could gain the trust of teens who had found so little reason to trust in their lives. One teen responded: "When we slam the door and hide, it doesn't mean that we really want you to go away. Don't give up on us!" It was a wonderfully open, sometimes humorous, occasionally wrenching dialogue—and both groups clearly learned a lot. When the teens left the room, the staff talked about the often delayed emotional development of young people in foster care and the need for a lifelong commitment to adoption. If the prospective parents think they've found a "match" with one of the teens, You Gotta Believe staff members step in to start the adoption process.

Erickson Blakney, Program Officer: In the birthplace of Hip Hop, also known as the Bronx, a pocket of youngsters have tuned in to Beethoven, Handel and Dvorak. **UpBeat NYC (\$50,000)** is an after-school youth orchestra program modeled after Venezuela's popular music education and character-building program "El Sistema" ("*The System*"). UpBeat was founded in 2009 by Liza Austria, a modern dancer, and her jazz-saxophonist husband Richard Miller. In June, I visited a charmingly decrepit old church, Tercera Iglesia Bautista in the South Bronx, where UpBeat students were excitedly rehearsing for a special public performance later that month. Reggie, a fifth-grader at Bronx Charter School for Excellence, plays the trombone. He happily explained that studying music helped him learn math, "It's cool because I have to know how to read, count and add quickly!" Ten-year old Aly has been studying clarinet for two years. She used to be a bad test-taker, but "now, I just think about the music we play and it calms me down." Ruben, an immigrant from Honduras came with his son Edmund, age 11. Drawn to the "buzz of activity" around the church, Ruben said his son was so committed to his music classes that he skipped watching World Cup Soccer that week to practice his trumpet. According to Ruben: "These two kids [Austria and Miller]...well they're not kids...but the two of them really know what they're doing!"

Jennifer Correa, Program Officer: **LOVE --Leave Out Violence (\$35,000)** is a small media and arts program for city teens who have experienced or witnessed violence. On a recent site visit, I could sense that this beautiful space was a safe and supportive environment. The comfy chairs were set up in a circle for group discussions, snacks were available everywhere. The program engages teens in conversations about the causes and consequences of violence in the context of the bullying and domestic violence in their own lives. To give them the tools to express their own stories and to communicate messages of non-violence, the staff provides an introduction to a variety of media and art forms including photography, filmmaking and poetry. On the day of our visit, the teens were discussing their experiences with police and school security officers. The young people were encouraged to offer suggestions for creating safer school environments and improved relations with police. I was struck by how much the LOVE staff exemplifies what Pinkerton believes in: giving young people a voice, a sense of purpose and creating strong and trusting relationships. The rich and personal conversations, the impressive artwork, and the free flow of emotions were a powerful testament to the depth of the connections forged by LOVE.

Danielle Pulliam, Program Officer: For years Pinkerton had turned down grant requests from what was then called the New York Junior Tennis League on the grounds that it was an almost sports-only program. Wow, has that changed. Now called **New York Junior Tennis & Learning (\$120,000)**, the program offers year-round after-school and summer activities that include

tennis but also offer wide ranging academic support for 3,500 students at 32 city schools. When I arrived at a summer site visit in the Bronx, the first stop was a tennis warmup for elementary school kids in the gym. A student was assigned to “improve my game” by teaching me the new techniques she had learned. Then it was off to a science class where first graders were making lava lamps out of oil, water, food coloring and Alka Seltzer—demonstrating some science principles that I missed in my years at Brown. When I asked how many of the kids wanted to be scientists, almost all raised their hands. Next, I visited a modern dance class where a group of fifth graders were learning a routine for a big end-of-summer event. After watching them practice, I asked what they had learned from the program. There were as many answers as there were students—and then they turned the tables on me. One precocious little girl said, “I want to see you dance.” With that, the teacher cranked up the music and I rocked out with the kids. Smiles all around--and for me, one of the treats of the year.