



By Walter Brooks

OUTREACH

Students dream TO ACHIEVE IN COMMUNITY ACADEMY

Lisa Jewell had been interviewing students at Benson High School in Omaha for several hours when Cortez Epinger walked into the small room — a closet really — and sat down across from her.

Jewell, coordinator of UNMC's Community Academy, looked at the 6-foot, African-American junior and decided to ask the hard question first. She had 100 applicants and only 46 available slots. In its second year, Community Academy was already a popular program.

"What do you think you can contribute to

Community Academy?"

Surprised and pleased at Jewell's straightforward approach, Epinger answered, "I enjoy working with children and other students as a mentor and friend. I want to share and work with

other Community Academy students and help improve the program."

Jewell asked a few more questions about grades, school subjects and extracurricular activities. Once she was satisfied that Epinger understood the level of commitment demanded of the program, not just from himself but from his parents as well, she shook his hand.

"I've heard and read enough. You're in," Jewell smiled.

Epinger smiled too. He was more than happy — he felt validated as a young man. He was joining a program that valued his mind.

Community Academy is a student enrichment program sponsored by UNMC's Office of Student Equity and Multicultural Affairs. The program's mission is to broaden the diversity of UNMC's relationships with secondary public school students.

Created by Jewell, coordinator for the Office of Special Projects for Student Services, the program draws widespread support by offering unique opportunities for multicultural students to interactively explore specific medical and health careers.

"Most students never visit a hospital until they or family members are sick," Jewell said. "We wanted to give them backdoor experiences at UNMC, so they could begin to see what happens here more from a career opportunity perspective."

Experiences include making casts for each other in bone anatomy class, learning pain management techniques at the Pain Clinic, and drilling and filling a tooth in the artificial training model at the College of Dentistry in Lincoln.

"My entire first-year group received American Red Cross certification in CPR and first aid," Jewell said proudly.

Epinger's first class session set the tone for his experience with Community Academy. The class, titled "HIV/AIDS: Making Smart Choices," was astonishing, he said.

"The main speaker had AIDS and answered every question we threw at her," Epinger said. "I felt I had never learned so much about something so important to everyday life. I knew after my first class that Community Academy was going to be informative and about real life. I haven't been disappointed."

From Lisa Jewell to Cortez Epinger, Community Academy supporters are determined to prove that if young people can dream it, they can believe it. And if they can believe it, they can achieve it.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT COMMUNITY ACADEMY, CONTACT JEWELL AT 402-559-6357. d



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Community Academy students Ellie Kirke, left, Northwest High School, Shilpa Lad, Burke High School, and Cortez Epinger examine household germ cultures they collected and grew on their own Petri dishes.