

CHAPTER 1

Giving the Gift

Catching the ball

The Genesis of Say Yes to Education

The University of Pennsylvania in the mid-1980s was at the beginning of a cycle of involvement with its surrounding community in an effort to establish a more open and responsive relationship. Central to the community's and university's concerns was the quality of the neighborhood schools. I formed the Collaborative for West Philadelphia Schools in 1986 as a vehicle for initiating dialogue and seeking solutions. It was chaired by Sheldon Hackney, then Penn's president, and the presidents of Drexel University and the Philadelphia College of Science and Pharmacy. Two bank executives, representing commercial interests, an associate superintendent for the city's schools, the superintendent for West Philadelphia, local teachers and principals, and several community activists comprised the committee's membership. The Collaborative was charged with researching the schools' needs and enlisting the institutions in finding appropriate solutions. As executive director of the Collaborative, I surveyed thirty area schools and learned that teachers, administrators, and parents were most concerned about the need for scholarship funds, the high dropout rates, and the lack of after-school tutoring services. Parents were particularly distressed by the fact that too few of their children were academically able to compete successfully for college admission. The agenda the Collaborative pursued based on that survey included: producing a resource guide for schools and

parents; identifying the kinds of services available through various agencies in the community; a massive recruitment and training of over six hundred students from the three colleges to act as tutors in thirty area schools; the College Access program in West Philadelphia, which raised \$1.2 million for students who were likely to be accepted by a college, but had insufficient funds to attend; Bridging the Gap, a research and implementation project designed to stem the dropout rate and improve planning and communication across school boundaries; and a program for a group of students entering seventh grade, who were selected for intensive educational support through high school and into a postsecondary education. In the spring of 1987, George and Diane Weiss agreed to sponsor such a program, which was named Say Yes to Education.

Bridging the Gap

In response to the dropout concern, I initiated an action research study that involved eight elementary schools and three middle schools, all feeding into one high school. The project, Bridging the Gap, analyzed student test data, grades, attendance patterns, and styles of teaching at each level (Newberg 1991). The organizing hypothesis asserted that students who accumulate histories of failure between grades one and eight are most likely to drop out by the end of ninth grade. Early warning signs are most apparent in the transition between elementary and middle schools, when academic expectations change. Often by fourth or fifth grade, students who eventually drop out are one to two years behind grade level in reading and math. These deficits compound as the students move through grades without ever catching up. Some of these problems were addressed by investing teachers and administrators in the success of a cohort, rather than a single grade of students, over multiple years and across school levels. Particular attention was given to the redesign of ninth grade into small “houses” or learning communities so that teachers could monitor student progress carefully and intervene quickly when students were failing. As a result of this work, the entire school district of Philadelphia was restructured into feeder pattern clusters in an attempt to reduce the scale of management and supervision. This work was replicated in the North Hollywood and Sun Valley schools in the Los Angeles Unified School District.

Tuition Guarantee Programs

Bridging the Gap functioned at a systemic level, affecting school organization, monitoring of student performance longitudinally, and providing teacher professional development (Newberg 1991). At a more micro level, Say Yes to Education attempted to demonstrate what could be accomplished when 112 low-resource inner-city students were supported by a sustained supplementary program over multiple years, providing some of the educational and social assistance available in more affluent school districts.

Tuition guarantee programs were first developed in the 1960s, as part of Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty and funded by the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 and the Carnegie Foundation. (Levine and Nidiffer 1996). Efforts to focus energy and expenditures on minority children, like the struggle to end segregation, reflected the belief that minority school failure could be remedied. A. Levine and J. Nidiffer identify three kinds of programs, each designed to address the academic and social needs of children born in poverty: transition, early intervention, and comprehensive programs (1996). At the federal level, the creation of Upward Bound in 1965 was intended to serve as a transition program between high school and college. There are currently 566 Upward Bound projects serving about forty-two thousand students. At least two-thirds of each project's participants must be selected from low-income households (under 150 percent of the poverty level) and neither of whose parents has graduated from college. Upward Bound projects offer extensive academic instruction as well as counseling, mentoring, and other support services. Students meet throughout the school year and generally participate in an intensive residential summer program that lasts from five to eight weeks. Most students—about 90 percent—enter Upward Bound while in the ninth or tenth grade, and about 35 percent remain with the program through high school graduation. Upward Bound projects are generally operated by two- or four-year colleges. The annual average cost per participant is about \$4,200. An initial evaluation of the program that followed a group to high school completion found that Upward Bound makes a substantial difference in the lives of certain groups of students, especially students entering the program with lower educational expectations, students with serious academic problems, and boys. Results also show that duration of participation is linked to positive program outcomes (Myers and Schirm 1999).

In addition to transition programs such as Upward Bound, the 1960s saw the creation of a number of early intervention programs, including A Better Chance (ABC). To date, ABC has placed more than eleven thousand middle and junior high school students in college preparatory schools, both public and private, nationwide. According to ABC's own statistics, more than 99 percent of A Better Chance graduating seniors immediately enroll in college. It should be noted that although ABC originally targeted low-income youth, their program has always focused on youth who have already demonstrated academic potential. More recently, changes in funding have resulted in a change in their target group, to largely middle-class youth. Their outcomes, therefore, while impressive, cannot be compared to programs such as Say Yes to Education, which targets low-income minority urban youth, regardless of academic ability.

Comprehensive programs, including tuition guarantee programs, move beyond academic counseling or short-term involvement; comprehensive programs provide not only mentors and academic, social, and cultural enrichment, but also make a long-term commitment to each individual in the program. Tuition guarantee programs are comprehensive programs that go one step further, by providing guaranteed college funding.

While characteristics of tuition guarantee programs differ, the typical program "adopts" a group of elementary school students, provides mentoring and academic supports, and guarantees some amount of money for college. The first and most widely known tuition guarantee program was started in 1981 by Eugene Lang in New York City. With nearly 180 projects in sixty-four cities across twenty-seven states, "I Have a Dream" (IHAD) has now served over thirteen thousand students during its more than two decades of operation. Most "Dreamers" who go to college are the first members of their families to do so. However, results vary among IHAD programs. Related to this finding, Levine and Nediffer expose a significant weakness in the IHAD programs. Because "there is no research base to indicate which elements of the program work and which do not, there is no way of understanding what makes IHAD effective" (Levine and Nidiffer 1996, 178). Beyond understanding the key elements of their success, IHAD has neither published data on postsecondary school outcomes, nor have they provided a comparison group to evaluate the program's effectiveness.

While Say Yes is in many ways similar to IHAD, association with universities differentiated Say Yes from its progenitor. IHAD prided itself on being a freestanding organization without an institutional home. Eugene Lang believed that each sponsor should have complete freedom to develop his or her program. It was his way of preventing bureaucratic tangles that might get in the way of serving IHAD children's needs. George Weiss and I held an opposite view, believing that there was much to gain by associating SYTE with universities, including research opportunities, a prodigious pool of student volunteers, and academic colleagues who could assist in meeting program needs or those of individual students. Association with a university would also provide the capacity to conduct systematic evaluation of a tuition guarantee program, up to and including postsecondary attainment rates of participants. Previous literature, including a report by the General Accounting Office, has recognized the need for evaluation that identified a comparison group at the outset (U.S. GAO 1990). The comparison group for SYTE is described in the data collection section.

A year after the start of SYTE, a second last-dollar scholarship program, Tell Them We Are Rising, was established in North Philadelphia by Temple University, with participants comparable to SYTE's in terms of the special education population, neighborhood influences, teenage pregnancies, and kinds of inner-city schools attended. This project allowed us to compare SYTE's postsecondary school outcomes to a similar scholarship program.

Say Yes to Education

The final agenda item from the work of the Collaborative was the creation of a program to support a cohort of students starting at the end of sixth grade and extending through postsecondary education. The program was operated by an executive director (the author of this book) who hired two project coordinators. As students worked their way toward high school graduation, SYTE coordinators provided such services as tutoring, counseling, regular home visits, advocacy, mentoring, college visits, internships, and summer school enrichment programs.

But for the recipients of the promise, the SYTE students, the pledge seemed distant and unreal. Few students could imagine in 1987 that they might be able to take advantage of the gift in 1993, the year they were scheduled to graduate from high school. The staff discovered

in their first meetings with students that they were reluctant or unable to describe the kind of person they wished to become. They had little or no orientation to the future.

Initially, the two African-American project coordinators, Randall Sims and Lily Holloway, visited each student's home to discuss the gift with their families, and to interview the students about their strengths, weaknesses, talents, and interests. The coordinators picked up a wealth of information about available family supports, and assessed the gaps in a family's ability to provide for their children. Fifty-three percent of the mothers and forty-seven percent of the fathers of these children had not completed high school. The program was asking a large proportion of parents to help their children achieve educational goals the adults had not attained themselves.

Each introductory student interview concluded with the following question: What would you like to be when you finish school? Fewer than twenty-five percent of students responded; they couldn't imagine a possible future. They did not see their parents as models of school success, and did not connect school with the ability to construct a viable future. Further, the school system they attended communicated, through its tracking and grade retention policies, that success in school was not for all children and, more precisely, not for them. Minority students from low-income families are particularly at risk for subject failure, retention in grade and, finally, dropping out. They feel devalued and, as a result, become alienated from school.

The SYTE program set out to create an alternative vision of the future for SYTE students, their families, and the schools they attended. The ensuing years of support provided by staff and sponsors required students to work hard, be persistently motivated to succeed, and believe that education could make a positive difference in their life chances. SYTE staff members were responsible for communicating the vision and translating its meaning into the incremental steps that students had to take to achieve their goals.

The staff carefully monitored students' academic performance. Regularly scheduled meetings with classroom teachers, counselors, and administrators assessed student progress and explored alternative methods of instruction when that seemed indicated. If SYTE was going to change the odds for student success, the staff believed that a comprehensive approach was essential—one that combined an array of social

supports, academic monitoring, advocacy for school reform, and deep parental involvement. In a sense, the program was much more than a gift that changed the opportunity structure for students from low-income families. The program was making a critical point: without transforming relationships and widening the sense of possibility, students would not be able to take advantage of better opportunities.

The Penn Connection

I have served as executive director since the program's inception in 1987. I recommend policy and implementation strategies, and provide general oversight to the five existing programs. Philadelphia has three chapters, each connected to the University of Pennsylvania. Both Hartford, Connecticut, and Cambridge, Massachusetts have established chapters in cooperation with Hartford University and Lesley University, respectively. For the Belmont group, Penn provided medical and dental services at no cost. Consultation on mental health issues was provided by the Penn Council for Relationships on a sliding scale. Close connections developed between the Penn football program and Say Yes, under the aegis of George Weiss. The football program supplied free tickets to games; but more importantly, Penn's winning team coach, Ed Zubrow, took a particular interest in the students. He ran football clinics for them and gave inspirational workshops on the dangers of drug use and dealing. Later, he became an active member of SYTE's board of directors. George Weiss, president of the board, had received his bachelor's degree from Penn's Wharton School of Business and Finance; students at Wharton who admired an alumnus's financial success and public largesse supported SYTE. Wharton's MBA program organized a Say Yes to Education club and sustained it for over a decade, recruiting hundreds of tutors and mentors. The Graduate School of Education offered office space and counsel from faculty. Former Dean Marvin Lazerson, also a board director, was instrumental in promoting the program within the university and nationally. He sponsored a national conference on university/community partnerships that brought practitioners and academics together to share ideas on how to deepen these connections. SYTE was featured in the conference program. The Penn connection offered a complex network of physical and human resources that would have been almost impossible for an independent entity to duplicate.

Meeting the Sponsors

In the spring of 1987, as executive director of the Collaborative for West Philadelphia Schools, I was searching for potential sponsors for the Say Yes to Education program. Sheldon Hackney, chair of the Collaborative, thought George and Diane Weiss of Hartford, Connecticut might be interested. George Weiss and Sheldon Hackney had met at an earlier time, and George had expressed his interest in setting up something like the I Have a Dream program. Based on that conversation, Dr. Hackney arranged for me to meet the Weisses in George's Hartford office. George was an associate trustee of the University of Pennsylvania and had founded a highly successful money management and brokerage firm. Diane was an activist who fought for integration in the schools her children attended in West Hartford, Connecticut. In addition to activism as a parent, she was also a knowledgeable educator with two master's degrees: one in student counseling and a second in school psychology with an emphasis on special education.

When I entered George's office, he stood up slowly from behind his desk and, with the aid of a cane, walked painfully to greet me. He explained that he was suffering from a severe back injury that was probably related to his training as a skull racer during his undergraduate years at Penn. George invited me to sit down and asked if I minded him reclining on the floor; being prone released pressure on his back and made it easier for him to talk. Orienting myself to his spacious office, I admired the giant photos of Penn football players in action displayed on the wall behind his desk. George had been a recruiter for Penn football, especially successful in bringing talented athletes to the team.

George's wife, Diane, came in, sat down on the floor with George and joined the discussion. I described several projects the Collaborative sponsored, including Bridging the Gap and Say Yes to Education. Very quickly George asked: "In that Say Yes program, would we be able to have direct contact with the kids? I don't want to just give money. We want to know the kids. We want to get involved in their lives." Diane concurred but added, "If we get into their lives, they'll want to be in our lives. It's a two-way street. Are we prepared for that?" Diane, with a background in counseling was sensitive to the nuances in relationships. George seemed to have made up his mind. "Yeah," he said, "that's OK. But in the beginning I may not be as involved as you might be. I won't be able to hop a plane and spend a day with them. Maybe later I could, if my back improves. So a lot would ride on your availability

and interest in this.” Diane was cautiously interested and said she’d like to think about it. George followed up with some questions about costs and urged me to get back to him in a week.

Who were these strangers who eventually agreed to take on the support of 112 inner-city students? How did their backgrounds prepare them for this unusual commitment?

Both of their parents were Jewish immigrants who fled Europe at the start of World War II. Diane’s mother was raised in Czechoslovakia. Her father, one of six children, was born in Russia and worked his way through college, eventually obtaining a law degree from Yale University. George’s father was born in Carlsbad, Austria. He aspired to be a doctor, but quotas during the mid-1930s in Vienna, as in the United States, restricted Jews’ attendance at medical school. Instead, he studied music and chemistry. As a young man he had a career as a conductor and composer.

As a child, George saw his father as the eternal student, taking numerous advanced courses at universities. Although a high achiever academically, he lacked the ability to express warmth for his son. George, by contrast, was a jock who felt challenged and rewarded by athletics, but was not interested in music or the sciences, his father’s passions. George thought of himself as “emotionally disadvantaged.” He longed for affection from his father.

During his youth, George’s father attempted a kind of intimacy with his son by posing difficult algebra problems for him to solve. This challenge earned George’s respect for his father’s brilliance, but left him with a longing for more ordinary ways of sharing with a son, like playing ball or going fishing. George’s room, above the family garage, was often freezing cold in the winter, but nonetheless gave him sanctuary. As an adolescent, he reflected that “I would just go off and listen to hockey games and study and I was sort of . . . a lot of people block emotionally and I was sort of in my own world. The aim was to just survive.” The lack of overt affection from his father left a void in George’s life, one he continuously searched to fill. He felt a closer affinity with his mother.

Born and raised in Vienna, George’s mother escaped Austria in the late 1930s. Having held a high administrative post in Vienna, she was able to transfer some of her administrative skills to hospital management when she immigrated to the United States. She commanded the higher salary; his father never cared about money. Lessons in

financial matters were better taught by his mother, who understood money and knew how to manage it. George thought he probably took after her.

Both parents were clear about how to use their “disposable income,” a term George learned at Penn’s Wharton School of Business, where he studied finance as an undergraduate. As Austrian refugees, the Weisses had seen how the Jewish community had been destroyed by the policies of the Third Reich. Therefore, once they earned salaries in America, George said they took “a large percentage of their disposable income and gave it to Israel. They felt that if Israel doesn’t make it, there’d be no hope for the Jews.” George was struck by his parents’ insecurity, but also their commitment to ensure a future for Jews. They modeled for him that giving had to have a purpose that was larger than ones’ immediate self-interest.

A precursor to his approach to philanthropy occurred when George was an undergraduate at Penn. One year his fraternity sponsored a Christmas party for a gang of Irish and Italian boys from south Philadelphia. The “12 Apostles,” as they called themselves, returned to the frat for other occasions, and George would often play basketball with them. After his graduation from the Wharton School of Business, George stayed in touch with the group. At one point, he invited the group to lunch. In the course of conversation, George realized that all twelve of these young men had graduated high school. George was stunned; he told them how proud he was of their accomplishment. He recalled they said: “George, we would not be able to look you in the eye if we dropped out.” At that moment, George made a promise that if he ever had the financial ability to make a difference, he would do it through education. But he did not want to just give money for scholarships; he wanted to get to know the people he was helping in a more “hands on” manner. He was successful and believed that now it was his turn to give back.

Two heroes shaped the values George believed influenced the way he lived his life; the biblical David and former ambassador to England and newspaper magnate Walter Annenberg. David represented a childhood hero: “. . . the little guy that conquered the all-powerful giant, Goliath. Maybe that’s part of my Jewish background. I used to get into a lot of fistfights as a kid and, being a Jew, when I was attacked I stood up for myself and my people, like David in the Bible did.” In adulthood, George didn’t abandon his self-image as the scrappy David who fights

for the underdog. By the time George entered his mid-40s he had established a highly successful investment firm that traded electric utilities worldwide.

The moment that captured the man George aspired to become occurred at a meeting of Penn trustees. Walter Annenberg announced that he would give \$120,000,000 to the university and George, a newly elected trustee, led the applause. Annenberg shook his head in disapproval. He approached the podium and said: "It is simply a matter of good citizenship." In that moment, Annenberg taught George how to think about wealth: its object is to do good in the world, not to accumulate things; it is about opening oneself up to others and demonstrating caring. In a reflective moment George comments: "I'll tell you what I'd like to see on my tombstone: 'here lies a man who made a difference.'" Establishing the Say Yes to Education college scholarship program in June 1987 gave George the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of 112 sixth-grade students who were about to graduate from an inner-city elementary school.

In its first five years, Diane participated actively in program development. She visited SYTE regularly and was a significant presence in all its aspects. Students grew to expect her unannounced visits to their schools, when she would counsel individual students about their academic work or personal concerns. Each summer she would move to Philadelphia for six weeks to teach writing and literature in SYTE's summer school. George was inactive the first year of the program, but when his back improved, he taught vocabulary development classes during summer school and hosted students in his West Hartford home. Because the Weisses were visiting Philadelphia on a regular basis, they bought a condominium in center city Philadelphia and entertained the students and their families in their home. These were times to meet in small groups over spaghetti dinners; they offered a chance for casual conversation. Not only did Diane and George meet with students and their families, but they also established close ties with the superintendent of schools and local politicians that gave them the opportunity to be effective advocates for the students' needs. In the spring of 1992, Diane addressed Philadelphia's City Council in support of the school district's plea for adequate funding for public education. She reflected on SYTE's work with the Belmont 112 over the previous five years, opening her address with this question:

What had we learned about the support of inner-city youth? The investment in human beings is unlike any other investment. There are no quick profits, no quick fixes, no easy solutions, but there are thousands of unknowns. The investment in human beings has to be taken seriously, early and long term—if it is to pay off.

She continued by urging the Council to maximize education dollars so that more children might benefit.

In his public statements, George often talked about how much the students had taught him—that they had made a better person of him. They taught him how to be a “*mensch*”—a Yiddish word meaning “a caring person” who could be touched by the pain poverty inflicted on innocent children. Giving the gift gave him access to his own feelings. It was much more than a tax break, as some critics suggested. The program connected him to the lives of individual students, their dreams, their limited horizons and opportunities. By providing the gift of a free higher education and supplemental social and academic supports to attain that goal, George felt he was redistributing some of his wealth so that more could share in the American Dream.

The combination of direct contact with students, their families, and political and educational leaders won recognition for the Weisses as people committed to making the program work. The purpose of Say Yes, from George’s perspective, “. . . is to show people out there that these kids are in every way as bright as your kids, or my kids. The difference between these kids is that the SYTE kids have the odds stacked against them. Give these kids the same nourishment and support and they will make it.” He summarized his reason for starting the program by reintroducing a basic theme in his life—“making a difference.” “If other people are encouraged to stand up and make a difference,” he asserted, “because we’ve shown the way, I think that’s basically what I wanted.” He wanted his message to reach people in business, school officials, government, and volunteers from all walks of life. In this instance, George made a difference by publicizing Say Yes so that others would follow his example.

George saw the program as a mix of the opportunity to go to college without the worry of loans, and sustained academic and emotional support by adults who cared. “You have to give kids hope,” he urged. “If there’s no hope, then they will drop out. The easiest thing to do is to drop out. Their parents have done it,” alluding to the fact that half of the Say Yes students’ parents had not completed high school.

“You have to give poor kids alternatives. Flipping hamburgers,” punching his point home, “is not a great incentive to stay in school.”

The Parents

Most parents appreciated the hope and the opportunity the Weisses extended. But George was concerned about those parents who did not attend the kick off meeting; some of those parents were less enthusiastic about the program. George remembered William Crandall's father who was paraplegic: “He didn't want to speak with me. He told me not to call him again. ‘And don't come to my door,’ Will's father said. ‘And don't help my kid. I can take care of my kid.’ ” George was stunned “because I knew what my motives were and I didn't really understand why Will's dad didn't understand what the program was about. So that really threw me.” He pondered: “I was sitting here saying, all I'm trying to do is help. So I tried to argue with him. But I still don't get it. I told him, ‘Your kid is important to me.’ Then he hung up on me.” George was incredulous. He couldn't imagine that a parent might question his motives, which he believes were “pure.” It was a hurtful rejection from a man in a weak physical and financial condition who did not want charity from a rich white man. Mr. Crandall's situation was unusually difficult, but he insisted on taking care of his own son in whatever way he felt was appropriate.

Poor people are placed in situations where they often need help. Unfortunately, that help is not always given in a way that respects the person receiving help. In fact, African-Americans can point to countless examples of abuse disguised as help. Consider the infamous Tuskegee Syphilis Study, in which 399 poor black sharecroppers in Macon County, Alabama were denied treatment for syphilis; they were deceived by physicians of the United States Public Health Service for forty years. The Tuskegee Syphilis Study was government-sponsored racism disguised as benevolent aid (Tuskegee Syphilis Study Legacy Committee 1996). In the private sector, there is an extensive history of African-American singers and songwriters who signed away lifetime rights to wildly successful songs and scores in return for a pittance. The number of African-American inventors in the early twentieth century will likely never be known, for their works were often appropriated by white men. Mr. Crandall's reaction may have been difficult to understand from the perspective of the sponsors, but for many African-Americans, skepticism would be a natural response to an offer that seemed too good to be true.

For sponsors and staff, Mr. Crandall's response was an early warning signal that we needed to be sensitive about how we gave support and to be aware of the message sent to those who were recipients.

Most parents, unlike Mr. Crandall, were pleased by the offer of the gift and embraced the Weisses for their generosity. Terrance's grandmother contrasted sharply with William's dad. "Terrance's grandmother always touched me," George remembered. "She has an artificial leg and we always joked about when we both get better we'll go dancing. So every time I've seen her, which is twice at Terrance's home, I kid with her saying, 'I'm ready when you are.' I always saw her as very supportive. She was in a tough situation, but she was there for Terrance and she was open with me."

Terrance's grandmother was not unusual in her capacity to be a giving person. Reviewing his experience with Say Yes families, George noticed: "I see very strong and loving mothers and grandmothers, but very little emotional support from the fathers. In a way, I see the SYTE families as even warmer than my own family." He reflected further on some of the differences between his own family and the students: "My father was distant, and my mother had to support the family, and I didn't get as much warmth and caring as some of these kids got."

If his parents could not give George the warmth and overt affection he craved, they did give him the unequivocal expectation that he would be an "educational success." His parents did not assume that George would necessarily go to an Ivy League college, "but there never was any thought that I wouldn't go to college. It was like not being a drug dealer. It just wasn't a factor. It was assumed I would go to college." George was aware that these students faced a different set of circumstances. George's father was a success in his academic pursuits and transmitted to his son a belief that education was important and necessary. George felt morally indignant with those whose sense of entitlement gives them the surety that they "have an earned privilege to a college education." "These kids," referring to the SYTE students:

from the moment they get up in the morning, have the whole system against them. They lack meals, quality schools, being taught by disinterested teachers, fighting their way through drugs. Some of our kids take three buses to get home and then have to take care of siblings, losing your childhood because you're an unwed mother. What opportunity have these kids had except Say Yes? It's almost nonexistent. That's why drugs. They are looking for some-

thing to substitute for real opportunity. They want the power of dollars in their pocket. So they deal. Sometimes it's money to support a family. It's not right? It's not right that their family is starving either. When I talked to the Say Yes kids, I noticed that some of them are very anti-Asian. And I said to them: "Don't be jealous of what the Asians achieved. They worked hard and got what they deserved. Take their success as motivation to work harder to get what you deserve."

George viewed inner-city life as a paradox. On the one hand he understood that "the whole system is against them." He knew that poor Blacks lack opportunity to make a better life through the legitimate economy and therefore they are reduced to making money through drug deals or other marginal legal or illegal pursuits. But he was also impatient with SYTE students, hearing them complain about Asians crowding out Blacks from the limited opportunity that may exist in the poor neighborhoods they share. George implied that the capitalist dictum of "picking yourself up by your own boot straps" has worked for other minorities and felt impatient with those Blacks who will not exert sufficient effort to improve their lot. He believed, for a moment, that hard work is rewarded by the creation of opportunity.

Choosing the School

The first major step in creating the SYTE program was the selection of a school; it was important to do so without bias. Therefore, I asked Dr. Constance Clayton, superintendent of Philadelphia public schools (1982–1994), to select the school and a particular class in which the scholarships would be awarded. I asked her to consider two criteria in selecting a group of students: they should reside in West Philadelphia within a short drive from the University of Pennsylvania and should come from low-income African-American families. She recommended Belmont Elementary School. The day before the public announcement of the gift, I learned that forty-four of the 112 students slated to leave sixth grade for middle school had learning disabilities and required instruction exclusively in special education classrooms. How did Belmont Elementary School attract such a large special education population? That question remained unanswered for several years. After some probing, I learned from Dr. Ronald Brown, director of special education from 1990 through 1993 in West Philadelphia, that Belmont, because

it was an underpopulated school, was designated as a regional special education center. Elementary schools throughout West Philadelphia sent their more difficult special education students to Belmont. However, the school had recently been selected for restructuring. A new principal, Sophie Haywood, was appointed the previous August 1986 with a mandate to whip Belmont into shape and quickly demonstrated that she was prepared for this task. During the year, she had reorganized reading instruction, welcomed parents and community members into the school, and focused everybody's attention on improving student achievement. When she learned of the Weiss' gift, she urged teachers to socially promote every student they possibly could into the commencement class. Mrs. Haywood "cleaned house" and insisted that Say Yes take the special education students who comprised 47 percent of the graduating class (Mezzacappa 1999b).

When I received the news about the large percentage of students enrolled in special education, I asked for a meeting with Penn's President Hackney, Marvin Lazerson, dean of the Graduate School of Education, and Barbara Stevens, executive assistant to the president. George Weiss was not able to come, but he and Diane contributed to the conversation via a conference call. I opened the meeting by stating that if we agreed to take on the special education students, we needed to accept the fact that many of these children had histories of chronic school failure. I raised the question of our ability to meet their needs within the context of a college-bound program. President Hackney, the father of an adult daughter who has an intellectual disability, weighed in quickly: "It's clear to me that we either include all of the students in the program or withdraw." George concurred: "It's like having two kids at Christmas or Chanukah and only giving one a present. I'm not going to have half of those students walk out of the auditorium disappointed. It's not what I'm about." Diane Weiss, who had experience evaluating special education students, argued that society saw these children as expendable. She asked us to fight against labeling and appreciate the potential each child has. Say Yes, the group concluded, was about hope, opportunity, and caring. Excluding the special education students seemed antithetical to the values the program espoused. SYTE should not deny any child the chance to make a better life through education.

After some debate, we agreed that all 112 students would be included. With this in mind, it was apparent that the Say Yes mission needed revision to include a wider range of student abilities. No

longer could we think of it as a program for regular education students bound for college. Some special education students might gain admission to a four-year college, but for others, that aspiration seemed unrealistic; more likely, these students would attend community colleges or vocational schools. So the program made provision for possible attendance at these schools. Initially, Say Yes was designed to challenge inner-city regular education students to achieve high academic standards so that they could avail themselves of an all expenses paid four-year college scholarship. This was an ambitious goal because of the low academic standards and expectations common in inner-city schools. In a sense, Say Yes attempted to compensate for the failure of the public schools to educate children who had largely been abandoned by society. If that were true for regular education students, the problems were compounded for those in special education. Special education classrooms in the mid-1980s had become dumping grounds for children in urban school systems that did not know how to educate or lacked the will to try.

Announcing the Gift

George's chronic back problem prevented him from making the June 17, 1987 public announcement of the scholarship; he asked Diane to speak for both of them. She opened her remarks to the graduates with a stunning offer: "We are making you an offer none of you can refuse. I promise you. You have won the lottery. How can you collect? I'm here this morning to tell each and every one here that we will guarantee your college education. My family will pay for every bit of it." She clarified the terms of the deal with more specific details. "That means if each and every youngster on this stage graduates from high school with a diploma and is accepted to a college or technical training school, we'll pay all the costs." She closed by affirming that her family would do more than give money. Each member of the Weiss family, including George, Diane, and their daughters Debbie and Allison, would be involved personally as tutors and mentors. At the very end, she threw several footballs into the crowd of students on the stage. She said it was now the students' turn to catch the ball and run with it. The symbolism was unmistakable. The football represented the scholarship each student was promised. Now it was the students' responsibility, with the program's help, to grab hold of the

opportunity and work hard to earn the prize on the other side of the goal post—high school graduation, a college education, or an appropriate postsecondary education. In the case of the Say Yes program, the givers of the gift (the Weisses) and those receiving it (the students) were connected in a way quite different from that of traditional gift-giving. The exchange did not end the day the scholarship was announced; the relationship between the donor and the recipient continued to develop and grow more complex over time. Although it would be some time before the students themselves would comprehend the power of the Weiss' gift, some of the parents had an immediate response. One parent explained her feelings:

That was something that never in a lifetime. . . . We walked through the streets celebrating and my neighbor met us at the door and said, "I seen it on the news" and everyone was ecstatic. And it was something, we grew up down here, and it was something in a lifetime we never would have seen. We have never, we would never have seen this opportunity in a lifetime.

The Role of the Media

On the day the scholarship was announced at Belmont Elementary School, three major television channels, *The Philadelphia Inquirer* and *The Daily News*, the premier city newspapers, and the *Philadelphia Tribune*, a prominent African-American newspaper, covered the story. Periodically over the succeeding thirteen years, national newspapers and television featured updates on SYTE students who became known to the public as the Belmont 112. While other media followed the story through infrequent updates, *The Inquirer* published several front-page stories about the program annually, giving it prominent visibility in the greater Philadelphia community and beyond. Dale Mezzaccappa, *The Inquirer's* education reporter, wrote these major stories and made Say Yes a regular part of her news beat.

Early on, George saw the value of publicity. He wanted to "market" the SYTE product to the public. In order to do so, George needed a public forum for telling its story. An alliance formed between the media, the Say Yes sponsors, and the program staff. George used SYTE publicity as a local and national platform to talk about education in the inner city, the ravages of poverty, and the need for a communal commitment to alleviate these problems.

I felt that the program also had an obligation to protect its students from the press. As young adolescents who were mostly twelve years of age, I did not think it would be constructive for them to see their names in print. George and I met with the education editor of *The Inquirer* to discuss the matter. The newspaper argued it would be discreet in how it described the children, but felt that using names would promote public recognition of individual students. And since *The Inquirer* intended to follow the school career of these children “until the bitter end” (said ironically) of the program, the editor wanted to use real names. After some discussion, we reached a compromise. The paper agreed not to use student names for the next two years—through the end of eighth grade. When the students entered high school in ninth grade, the reporter, Dale Mezzacappa, would be required to ask each student’s permission before his or her name could appear in print. The agreement was honored through junior high school and even into ninth grade, but by tenth grade it was abandoned. Students were not always told that what they said in an interview would appear with their name in the newspaper. My response was to tell the students they had the right to refuse an interview and to be aware that if they did agree to speak with a reporter, their names would appear in the newspaper.

Parents and students had an uneasy reaction to the constancy of the press in their lives. Some parents felt the press was only interested in the seamy side of ghetto life. As one parent said at a SYTE meeting, “If Dale came to my house, she might be surprised to see that my son has a bed of his own made up with clean sheets and blankets. That might disappoint her.” Other parents said, “They’re only interested in how many of our girls get pregnant.” “They love to talk about drug dealers and how our boys end up in jail or get killed.” Robin Wall Hill, a SYTE project coordinator, who was with the program for the first five years, interrupted the parents’ complaints when she explained: “They need to sell newspapers. They need an angle that’s going to make people read the paper. And often the angle is about how things are bad in the ghetto.”

The announcement of the gift at the Belmont graduation in June 1987 was a major public event. With newspaper and television media present that day, there was little opportunity for the students and their families to get to know the sponsors. But in the fall of that year, George and Diane met about seventy-five of the students and many of their parents at an inaugural party held in Gimbel Gym on Penn’s campus. George, still nursing his bad back, walked around the large room holding

on to a cane. He shook parents' hands and hugged students. He wanted a sense of intimacy with these families so that he might develop some appreciation of their lives, especially their hopes and fears for their children. This kind of disclosure necessarily takes time. But he and Diane and their daughters had committed themselves to a long-term relationship. The program acknowledged that students might not be able to finish the traditional four-year bachelor's degree in four years. The program understood that many of the students had familial responsibilities and might need more time. Therefore the program gave students seven years to complete a bachelor's degree. In practice, most completed the program in five years. In two exceptional cases, one student took six years and another took six and a half to complete their studies. This night in the fall of 1987 was the beginning of that journey.

The Communities

How realistic and how probable is it that inner-city Blacks can succeed in education without an intervention like SYTE? The following section reviews the literature and describes the Belmont feeder pattern—those communities or census tract neighborhoods that send children to Belmont Elementary School—whose statistics speak of the conditions that existed in the very communities where the Belmont 112 were raised.

Over the last twenty years, a large body of literature has demonstrated that certain structural problems pervade inner-city communities. W. J. Wilson (1997), D. S. Massey and N. A. Denton (1993), and E. Anderson (1990, 1999) present evidence that segregated inner-city Blacks are trapped in an environment characterized by low income, unemployment, and underemployment. Businesses and manufacturing entities that provide employment have abandoned these neighborhoods. Segregation perpetuates poor schools that inadequately prepare the next generation, produce an inordinately large percentage of unwed mothers who are destined for welfare dependency, and increase crime and drug sales. In particular, the decade of the 1980s saw an increase in income inequality and a polarization between the haves and the have-nots. The term widely used in the 1980s for the urban poor was the “underclass,” which carried with it pejorative ideas of criminal, antisocial, and dysfunctional behavior. This “blame the victim” mentality often masked the reality of poverty in urban centers; the societal factors imposed on people living in poor neighborhoods inhibited their ability to move

beyond their position. In an effort to more accurately define these externally imposed obstacles, Joel Devine in 1993 developed a definition of “underclass” that tried to focus the problem more appropriately:

Persons living in urban, central city neighborhoods or communities with high and increasing rates of poverty, especially chronic poverty, high and increasing levels of social isolation, hopelessness, and anomie, and high levels of characteristically antisocial or dysfunctional behavior patterns. (p. 94)

Anderson, who has written ethnographic studies of two of the neighborhoods in the Belmont feeder pattern, observes that with the United States’ shift from a manufacturing economy to a service and high-tech economy, workers with limited education and minimal work skills are displaced by those in more affluent communities who have the education and the competence that match the needs of the new economy. “In cities like Philadelphia,” Anderson (1999) states:

Certain neighborhoods have been devastated by the effects of de-industrialization. Many jobs have been automated, been transferred to developing countries, or moved to nearby cities like King of Prussia. For those who cannot afford a car, travel requires two hours on public transportation from the old city neighborhoods where concentrations of black people, Hispanics, and working-class Whites live. (p. 110)

The casual observer is fast to moralize about the inability of the poor to find work, and resents their substitutions for work such as welfare dependency, teen pregnancy, and drug trafficking. These and other rackets are there to pick up the economic slack. In addition, quasi-legal hustling, like holding down three and four jobs and other under-the-table cottage industries that go unreported, teach the younger generation how to survive in an economy in which they can not compete directly (Anderson 1999). In what ways did the neighborhoods in which SYTE students were born and raised conform to these patterns? How did the demographics of Belmont Elementary reflect on the lives and families of the Belmont 112?

The feeder pattern for the Belmont Elementary School comprises the following neighborhoods: Powelton Village, West Powelton, Mantua, Belmont, East Parkside, and Mill Creek, all located east of 52nd Street

and north of Market Street, the main east-west thoroughfare through the city. They straddle Lancaster Avenue, the main commercial district for this area.

Poverty was widespread in this part of West Philadelphia, an underlying cause of the physical deterioration. In four out of seven of the census tracts within these neighborhoods, 1990 median incomes were less than 53 percent of the city median. The Belmont 112 were not alone in their struggle to escape poverty. By 1992, the national poverty rate had reached its highest levels since the 1964 War on Poverty, with 40 percent of the poor being children (J. Freedman 1993). Like many inner-city neighborhoods, the Belmont area was characterized by high unemployment, low-educational attainment, high rates of infant mortality, and very low birth weights. Many of the neighborhoods in the area were plagued by drug use, drug trafficking, and crime. Residents of these neighborhoods called their area "the bottom." Prior to the major shutdowns of local factories and other sources of employment, "the bottom" was a term of intimacy and pride. By the 1980s, the term had taken on a negative connotation descriptive of the down and out feeling of pervasive poverty.

The Belmont neighborhood itself, located just north of Lancaster Avenue at 41st and Brown Streets, displayed significant contrasts between blocks, some well-kept with houses in good repair, and others in which the housing was deteriorating and vacant lots were frequent. The bleak and desolate appearance of the area surrounding the school was matched by a devaluing of human life through poverty, drugs, and violence. Between 1987 and 1993, over half of SYTE students' parents had been involved in taking illegal addictive drugs for at least two years. While the number of SYTE students using drugs was relatively small, the percentage involved in selling drugs was high. A veteran teacher who taught at Belmont for over thirty years noted that when she asked her "third-graders to describe the things they see on their street, twenty-five years ago children talked about people sitting on front stoops, kids playing, and dog poop by the trees. Now kids talk about hiding behind front steps to escape gunfire, covering their ears when they hear police sirens, and finding drug caps strewn along the pavement." The high incidence of black-on-black murder is directly related to drug trafficking. One community member mourned the loss of an increasing number of young black men murdered in the early 1990s. She noted with despair that:

A lot of children that graduated from Belmont, a lot of males that graduated from here, were killed in gangs and a lot of them got killed, you know around here in the neighborhood. With drugs and, you know, dealing in drugs and things like that. At one point I was going to funerals like crazy.

Of the Belmont 112, five were murdered in drug-related incidents. The scholarship offer did not spare them.

School personnel estimated that 60 percent of Belmont school children during the 1980s lived in households headed by single females and 70 percent were on welfare. SYTE parents were on the high end of this range, with 75 percent of families headed by single mothers and between 65 to 75 percent on welfare.

The average poverty rate for the entire feeder pattern was 35 percent or nearly four times the citywide poverty rate of 9 percent in 1980. By 1990, the feeder pattern for Belmont had changed little; the poverty rate was 33 percent while the citywide poverty level had doubled to 16 percent. Predictably, family incomes attest to the level of poverty in the Belmont feeder pattern. Incomes ranged from \$6,124 to \$16,957, less than half the median income for the city in 1980 and less than the national median income of \$21,023. By 1990, the median income ranged from \$7,710 to \$19,195, approximately 50 percent less than the citywide family median income of \$30,140 which was also less than the national median for all families of \$35,353. Black median incomes nationally were similar to the median incomes in Belmont, at \$12,674 in 1980 and \$21,423 in 1990.

Apart from the percentage of welfare recipients in the Belmont feeder pattern, a large number of residents were unemployed. The number of those included as unemployed in the U.S. Census is a drastic undercount because only those people actively looking for work are included. The chronically unemployed are not counted. In 1980, the average unemployment rate was approximately 26 percent, or more than three times the citywide rate of 8 percent. In 1990, the average for Belmont was still three times higher than the citywide rate, at 20 percent vs. 6 percent.

Looking just at the national unemployment rate in 1988 for black males between the ages of eighteen and nineteen, nearly one in three males were out of work (31.7 percent). Also in 1988, the Congressional Research Service determined that key measures of standard of living,

including real wages, had fallen since the 1970s. They found that the average worker entering the workforce in 1988 was likely to earn less than someone who had entered the workforce fifteen years earlier (Bingaman 1988). The effect of a chronic lack of adequate employment has far-reaching effects at the individual and the community levels. For the individual, long-term entrenched poverty is the direct effect. For the community, the limited tax base results in a substandard infrastructure that is unable to support quality schools, provide health and housing assistance, or encourage entrepreneurship.

Not surprisingly, Belmont feeder pattern residents had attained lower educational status than residents of other areas. They fell short of citywide and national rates by percentages roughly analogous to the difference in income levels, poverty levels, and the percentage of welfare recipients.

These demographic factors probably contributed to the low level of academic accomplishment many area adults experienced when they were in high school. In 1980, 48 percent of residents in the Belmont feeder pattern, on average, had attained less than a high school diploma. Similarly, only 50 percent of SYTE parents had completed a four-year high school education. These figures worsen when compared to the number of students who graduated from the high school most Belmont students attend. Only 25 percent of the entering ninth grade class had graduated from University City High School four years later in 1992, one year earlier than the SYTE students were scheduled to graduate.

Segregated high schools in inner-city communities are notorious for the poor quality of instruction. And low expectations from educators combined with poverty-stricken home lives produce outcomes for students that condemn them to marginal futures with few options. When Richard DeLone studied histories of inner-city children for the Kenniston Commission at Yale University during the 1970s, he determined that there was little reason for these children to hope for a better future than their parents,' hence the title of his book *Small Futures* (1979). Jonathan Kozol's *Savage Inequalities* documented the vast differences between spending in urban districts and suburban districts (1991). Stories of crumbling buildings, not enough chairs for students to sit on, and no textbooks to read contrast with suburban schools housed in glittering buildings filled with the latest technology, new textbooks every year and small class sizes.

One contributor to the inequality in per pupil spending is the declining role of state spending on local school systems in Pennsylvania.

The share of local school costs that comes from the state has been shrinking for three decades (Gewertz 2001). In the 1970–71 school year, the state provided an average of 54 percent of the cost of schools statewide. In 2000, the state covered an average of only 37 percent of the cost of public education. The level of state funding provided in Pennsylvania is low by national standards; only thirteen states contribute less than 40 percent. To compensate for the loss of state funding, local tax rates have risen. In the late 1990s, local property taxes rose by \$1.7 billion to compensate for the loss of state funding. The increased reliance on property taxes exacerbated funding inequality, due to the fact that the tax base in the suburbs was considerably higher than the base available for taxation in the city. Of the dollars that do flow from the state, the formula used to distribute these dollars does not provide a foundation amount to the districts with concentrated poverty sufficient to ensure an adequate education. A foundation formula, which is used by at least forty states nationwide, would guarantee all districts a minimally adequate level of funding. In the 1999 school year, Pennsylvania's highest spending school district spent \$222,000 more on a class of twenty-five students than the state's lowest spending district (Gewertz 2001).

Quite possibly as a result of these spending inequities, nearly half of Pennsylvania's students are failing to demonstrate proficiency in math and reading as determined by the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (Donley and von Seideneck 2003). Nationally, urban students perform far worse, on average, than children who live outside central cities on virtually every measure of academic performance. As studies show that achievement is directly related to the quality of teaching, statistics also reveal the difference in the quality of teachers urban districts can afford compared to suburban districts. Lower per pupil expenditures in urban districts, combined with the additional challenges urban teachers face, restrict the quality of teachers urban districts can attract. Secondary students in high-poverty schools are twice as likely as those in low-poverty schools (26 percent vs. 13 percent) to have a teacher who is not certified in the subject taught (Olson 2003). Students in high-poverty, high-minority schools are also more likely to be taught by inexperienced teachers. Schools serving high-poverty, high-minority, and low-achieving students have a harder time not only finding qualified teachers, but also keeping them. In high-poverty middle schools in Philadelphia, for example, 46 percent of teachers in 1999–2000 had come to their schools within the previous two years (Neild et al. 2003).

This inequality in the schools ironically is occurring at the same time spending on prisons is skyrocketing. A recent report shows that during the 1980s and 1990s, average state spending on corrections grew at six times the rate of state spending on higher education, and by the close of the millennium, there were nearly a third more African-American men in prison and jail than in universities or colleges (Justice Policy Institute 2002).

For those who managed to complete high school, college costs were climbing out of reach. College costs went up by approximately 60 percent in the decade of the 1980s and by approximately 40 percent in the 1990s (College Board 2002).

In summary, the Belmont feeder pattern reflects some of the more daunting aspects of segregated life for Blacks in the inner city, with high unemployment and underemployment leading to poverty and the need for government assistance. Lack of employment opportunities often seduces young black males to improve their lot by selling drugs. Drug-selling gangs in the inner city take care of their homies by offering them a false sense of security through incomes they do not have the skills to earn in the dominant society. Frequently older men, twenty to thirty years of age, direct these gangs and deliberately hire school-age kids to sell drugs. Juveniles, if arrested by police, receive light sentences and are soon out on the street looking for the drug lord who would employ them. It is a fail-safe compact that protects the adult who makes most of the profits off the kids' backs. These gangs are also the source of violent rivalries that contribute to the tragically high number of deaths among black males.

Schools offer little relief or refuge from life on the streets. This is the backdrop against which the Belmont 112 played out their lives. Generally, within constrained conditions, people have some choice. They can choose to be "decent" or "street" in Anderson's language. But certain conditions and circumstances can predetermine direction. Racism, poverty, and lack of opportunity perpetuate and reproduce negative conditions. The paucity of opportunity makes escape from poverty through education precarious.

The Social Context

Despite the reality of inner-city life, the idea that Blacks and other minorities lack ambition, motivation, and persistence to work their way

out of poverty has currency in this country; poverty is viewed as self-inflicted. Initially, George seemed to agree with Shelby Steele's (1990) critique in his book *The Content of Our Character: A New Vision of Race in America*; Steele chides fellow Blacks for whining about the bad cards fate dealt them and urges them to take charge of their lives. Steele is fully aware that discrimination against Blacks has been a destructive force for generations. Therefore, he urges that while Blacks and Whites must fight racism, Blacks must simultaneously find the energy and motivation to support themselves. This line of reasoning is consistent with black conservatives' argument against welfare entitlements, perhaps best articulated by the work of Thomas Sowell, a black economist at Stanford University (1981). Interventions such as welfare and affirmative action, Sowell believes, deaden initiative among Blacks to compete for a better standard of living. George concurred with this analysis; but as his earlier statements attest, he understood that the system has not created a level playing field.

Of course, this belief is not a new one for Americans. In the 1860s, Ralph Waldo Emerson published his essay, "Self-Reliance," in which he stresses the importance of taking responsibility for one's own situation and depending only on oneself for support. "But do your work, and I shall know you. Do your work, and you shall reinforce yourself" (Emerson 1865, 54). Not only does Emerson declare the importance of self-reliance, but criticizes social institutions whose mission it was to aid those in need: "Then again, do not tell me, as a good man did today, of my obligation to put all poor men in good situations. Are they my poor? I tell thee, thou foolish philanthropist, that I grudge the dollar, the dime, the cent I give to such men as do not belong to me and to whom I do not belong" (Emerson 1865, 52). Some Americans do "grudge the dollar" paid through taxes for social programs. Though Say Yes is not supported by the taxpayer's money, public criticism continued to be directed at a program that sought to break the cycle of poverty and teach 112 students to help others do the same.

In the United States, there is a general feeling that "holds disadvantaged groups, such as inner-city Blacks, largely responsible for their plight" (Wilson 1997, 159). In fact, a survey administered between 1969 and 1990 consistently identified "lack of effort by the poor themselves" as the most popular noninstitutional explanation of poverty (Wilson 1997, 160). The Say Yes students were assumed to be responsible for their own economic situation and therefore could not ignore the feeling that

perhaps they should work themselves out of poverty, without assistance from social programs. More specifically, Say Yes students had to contend with public opinion in their own community as the local press tracked the progress of the program. From the day they received scholarship pledges in front of cameras and reporters, the students were made all too aware of the criticism not only of their program, but their lives. Headlines such as “More Felons than College Graduates” and “The \$5 Million Lesson” raised concern as to whether or not the students “deserved” the time and money that had been invested in them (Mezzacappa 1999b). Some of the students even faced angry parents and teachers who believed the program was “wasting good money on those Say Yes kids” (Mezzacappa 1999c).

With increasing exposure to the lives the Belmont 112 led, George Weiss came to understand some of the obstacles that affected students’ ability to use the scholarship productively. The demographics of the Belmont feeder pattern predicted that the Belmont 112 would have “small futures.” Perhaps these data explain why fewer than 25 percent of SYTE students could offer any answer when our staff asked them to imagine a vocation they hoped to pursue. If students believe they will inherit “small futures,” it is unlikely they will construct positive dreams they cannot realize. The Weisses and the SYTE staff helped students frame images of “possible selves” (Markus and Nurius 1986), representing ideas of what they might become, shaped by exposure to neighborhoods outside the “bottom.” Students began to see different ways of living and slowly tried on new roles and foreign ideas.

Gift-giving engenders an asymmetrical relationship between the giver and the recipients of the benefactor’s magnanimity. The scales are out of balance and, from the recipient’s perspective, the debt may feel unpayable. Hence, a feeling of dependence can ensue. How the SYTE students received the gift and the meanings they attached to it form the framework of the next chapter. As the reader will see, the scales were not always out of balance, particularly when the students taught the sponsors and staff about their lives and the need to recalibrate the kind of support offered if the students were to become successful users of the gift.