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SE Qns. interns build future

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For 23 southeast Queens young adults, Friday was the beginning of a new and more successful life.

The group was the first graduating class of the city's Young Adult Internship Program for high school dropouts and unemployed people from 16 to 24. During the commencement ceremonious at the Black Spectrum Theatre in Jamaica, the program's consultant, Dr. James Bethea, congratulated the interns on turning their lives around and finding their talents.

"This initiative is a testament of faith and belief. Our young people are looking for a reaffirmation of their belief," he said.

The program, co-sponsored by the Jamaica-based non-profit Southern Queens Park Association, places the young men and women in 14-week internships at a variety of Queens businesses and services, including U.S. Rep. Gregory Meeks' (D-Jamaica) office, Kabinet King and St. John's University.

Intern Travis Edwards, who interned at the Animal Hospital, said he enjoyed his time there learning basic office skills that he would use for the rest of his life.

"I'm leaving here with a lot more than what I came with," said Edwards, who will attend Queensborough Community College and plans to get a degree in veterinary studies.

Since the pilot program began in the fall, numerous employers have signed on not only to have extra help in their offices, but also to lend a helping hand to local youth. Deirdre Samuel, coordinator of volunteer services at the state Veterans Home in St. Albans, said she was very pleased with the work that her five interns did during their 14 weeks.

"The best thing about this is that the youth have something to put on their resume," she said. "There were a lot of basic job skills that I'm trying to instill into the teens."

As the nearly two dozen adolescents and young adults accepted their graduation certificates, a new group of interns looked on attentively as they prepared for their first week of YAIP, which began Monday.

The program is funded by the city's Youth and Community Development Department, which aims to provide help to low-income youth. Although the pilot program has not been fully evaluated yet, the agency's directors said they are confident that the interns are meeting their goals.

"I do know some of the internship employers decided to hire these kids permanently," said Adam Rabiner of the Youth and Community Development Department.

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