

Program needs volunteers

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senior internship because she feels the program is an excellent exposure vehicle to law and social work. Ms. Owens began her work in the program in September.

The German born 'army brat' said the first thing she noticed when she began her internship was that very few blacks were involved in the program. "I'm very proud of this program," she said. "I've seen it make a difference in these children's lives. But wouldn't it be nice if we had more black guardians." Ms. Owens said the lack of black positive role models for these children sends the a distorted message that may color the child's perception of himself. "If a black child is in need of the person who always comes to

their rescue is some white person, what do you think the child thinks about himself."

Ms. Owens said as a group of people, blacks should be concerned that their children are being neglected and abused. She said that some children regard a guardian as the only friend they have when they are going through the court system.

The Guardian ad Litem program started in 1983. It is divided into two phases. The program's staff attorneys represent at risk children in court as attorney advocates once a social service agency determines a child is in need of legal help. Most of the children who end up in court have been the objects of abuse or neglect or are

defendant upon the state. The guardian investigates the background circumstances of the child's situation. "We talk to neighbors, grandparents, uncles, aunts, anyone who can help understand what happened to the child and why it happened," Ms. Owens said. "We gather as much information as we can and are there when the child or children assigned to us go to court."

In addition to investigating the facts behind the charges brought in court, Ms. Owens said, guardians also make recommendations to the court like visitation guidelines for parents, whether the child should stay in the custody of the social services department, or if the child's parent or parents

should be involved in drug counseling. She said they also are able to advise and inform foster parents about the child has been through and what types of behavior they might see as a result.

Ms. Owens said one of the big problems the program faces is that some of the guardians currently working in Forsyth county are inactive. She said she is one of them. "What that means," she said, "is that they already have a full caseload and are not equipped to handle any more."

That is another reason Ms. Owens is lobbying to get more people, Afro-Americans in particular, involved in the program. She said she understands that the socio-economic condition for many Afro-Americans may keep some from getting involved. She said a friend of hers told her once, "If I've got

so month at the end of the money, then I can't focus on other people's problems."

And she is quick to point out her plea for more Afro-American involvement is not viewed in the wrong light. "I want to make sure that this is not a statement about black people as parents or black women as mothers," Ms. Owens said. "This is a statement about racism and its effect on us as a people." She said people are frustrated with their economic situations and may turn to drugs or alcohol as a way out. She said people who abuse drugs as have as their main focus their drug of choice not their children. But Ms. Owens said she believes there people in the Afro-American community who can help if they knew about this program. Ms. Owens a new class to train

guardian volunteers is scheduled to begin May 2. She said people who are interested should call Linda Garra, the program coordinator, at 761-2384. She said program lasts about five weeks. That training involves visits to the courts, getting an understanding of the role the department of social services plays, talks with attorney advocates, a seminar with a physician on recognizing signs of physical abuse and other german topics that help guardians in their work.

Ms. Owens said the role the guardian plays for the at risk child coming through the court system is that of a friend. "It does that child a world of good to look up in that sterile courtroom environment and see a friendly face," she said.

Minorities lacking

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students comprise 6 percent of that total. However, of the 2,174 students identified as gifted, only 181, 8 percent, are minorities when blacks and other race groups make up roughly 37 percent of the total student body.

Administrators in the Cumberland County School System in Fayetteville are using the research uncovered by Ms. Frasier and others to increase the number of gifted minority students. Earlier this month, James F. McKethan and Faye R. Riner shared their plan with teachers and administrators attending the Annual Conference of the North Carolina Association for Gifted and Talented.

Cumberland County was cited by the state Department of Education for its lack of minority representation in its gifted programs. During the 1987-88 academic year, about 40 percent of the students in Cumberland were Afro-Americans, 1.7 percent, Asian; 1.5 percent American Indian; and 1.8 percent, Hispanic. But the state told Cumberland schools' officials that those numbers did not compare proportionally because 14 percent of the AG students were black in 1988, 3 percent, Asian; 1 percent, Hispanic; and 1 percent American Indian.

supported Ms. Frasier's research and school officials concluded that "the pool of students to be screened for the AG program should include students exhibiting gifted behaviors as well as students who have achieved high scores on standardized tests," Ms. Riner said. "A variety of test instruments should be used in the identification process so that the students' gifted behaviors match the testing used and that follow-up testing may be needed."

Enrichment may be necessary as a follow-up to testing, she said, when the disadvantaged student does not place into an AG program. Ms. Riner added, "In all cases, all testing should be reviewed with the purpose of determining specific interventions, enrichment and acceleration. The identification of all students is most successful when the individual school is receptive, supportive and encouraging toward the identification of the students."

Officials in the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools recognize that they, too, have a problem with low minority representation in the AG program, said Drenda Lalor, AG curriculum specialist in the city-county system.

"Yes, minorities are obviously underrepresented in our program, too. We've not made it public in the past,

but minority candidates who have not done well on big group tests, we offer them individual, private testing given by a psychologist," Dr. Lalor explained. "But we have had to handle this discreetly because white parents want to know, 'Why aren't you doing this for my child?'"

"We've even had a black guidance counselor to say it wasn't fair because we asked them to screen minority students for gifted behaviors and talents. She said it was unfair to her white students. But we felt this was the effort we needed in order to get minorities in the program."

A study committee is currently reviewing the AG program, Dr. Lalor added, particularly the underrepresentation of minority students. On April 5, the schools are sponsoring a work session that will feature presentations from Cumberland County and Greensboro City schools' AG coordinators.

"Both plans have been successful and we hope by taking a look at both that we'll be able to take their procedures and put them in our process," said Dr. Lalor. "Now we have fall aptitude tests and the spring CAT but we also have a retest in May and that's just another chance for the minority child to make it into the program. We want to make sure we have given them every opportunity."



Photo by Dr. C.B. Hauser

Imam Khalid Abdul Fattah Griggs, director of the Institute for Islamic Involvement, welcomes Imam Jamil Abdullah Al-Amin (formerly known as H. Rap Brown) and Hesham Jaaber to the Third Annual El Hajj Malik Shabazz (Malcolm X) Commemorative Conference at Winston-Salem State University.

Malcolm X honored at WSSU

Chronicle Staff Report

One of the most recognized and revered leaders of the Afro-American community was honored last weekend at Winston-Salem State University 25 years after his assassination.

El Hajj Malik Shabazz, better known as Malcolm X, was remembered at the third annual Commemorative Conference last Saturday in the R.J. Reynolds business center. The event was sponsored by the Institute for Islamic Involvement, Inc., based in Winston-Salem.

Among the presenters at the conference were Imam Khalid Abdul Fattah Griggs, director of the Institute for Islamic Involvement, and Malikah Shabazz, daughter of Malcolm X. She and her twin sister witnessed their father's murder.

Hesham Jabber, a North Carolina native, described the feelings he had about the murder of Malcolm X, on Feb. 21, 1965, in the Audubon Ballroom, in New York City's Harlem quarter. It was he who performed the funeral prayers for the "Black and shining prince," as Malcolm X was called, after the traditional service was completed. Jabber also prepared his body for burial, wrapped in the proper Islamic shroud.

One of the highlights of the conference came during the address by the conference's keynote speaker, Imam, Jamil Abdullah Al-Amin (formerly known as H. Rap Brown). Few people captured the imagination of the American public as he did during the turbulent decade of the 1960's when he was national chairman of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating committee

known as SNCC (pronounced snick).

Al-Amin delivered a moving discussion on the meaning of struggle in light of Malcolm X's martyrdom and his personal transformation from fiery orator into Muslim Imam (leader). He told the gathering of muslims and non-muslims that Islam is not an ideology but a methodology.

"Ideology by definition means visionary think or dreaming... methodology says if you were to apply certain kinds of practices or programs you will get a desired result," he said. He told the spectators that, "Allah (God) says: He will not change the condition of people until they change that which is within themselves... until they get away from that old sense of thinking that because you are black and you extol blackness that you think there is some virtue in the color itself."

To help advise them, Cumberland County Schools selected a committee the majority of its members minorities - from community people, officials from predominately Afro-American Fayetteville State University and school officials, Ms. Riner explained.

One of Cumberland's main problems, and those experienced by other school systems, was that it was locked to using California Achievement Test (CAT) results to identify AG students, said Ms. Riner.

"If you're going to identify a lot of kids for the program you have to go beyond just that kind of data," she said. "Your country club variety gifted parents who will knock you down until their child is in the program. When there are others, who unless we act as their advocate, won't get into the program."

"The number of black students identified as gifted, however, remains small," Ms. Frasier said.

Reasons Afro-American students are readily identified for AG programs, as identified by Ms. Frasier, include:

- the use of definitions of giftedness that reflect middle class, majority culture values and perceptions,
- the use of standardized tests that do not reflect the exceptional abilities of minority students,
- low referral rates for gifted assessment from parent and teachers,
- low socioeconomic status causing differences in environmental opportunities that enhance intellectual achievement, and
- cultural and class differences in the manifestation of gifted behaviors.

"Though a broad-based screening using information gathered from a variety of sources has been frequently commended, nominations by teachers tend to be the most used initial screening method," said Ms. Frasier. When teacher nominations are relied upon to identify the pool of students from whom participants are selected, minority students are often at a disadvantage. To remedy this situation, it has been strongly recommended that nominations be sought from multiple sources both within and outside the school to assure the nomination of all potentially eligible students."

Cumberland County school officials implemented Ms. Frasier's research at a test school, where the majority of students - grades four through eight - were minorities from low-income families, Ms. Riner said. The data they collected at the field test

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