Dr. Vicki Alexander, "Mother of Berkeley Public Health," to receive 2017 Benjamin Ide Wheeler Award - Oct. 28

Dr. Vicki Alexander, a trailblazer in the field of Maternal Child Health, is being honored for her lifetime of service to Berkeley’s most vulnerable populations. Born in 1944, Dr. Alexander was one of the first African-American women to attend medical school and go on to become a Maternal Child Health Director in Berkeley.

In 1995, "Dr. Vicki," as she is affectionately known, accepted a position as Maternal Child Health Director and Health Officer for the city of Berkeley. A few years into her tenure, she noticed the birth-weight disparity in a federal study that came across her desk. "I couldn’t believe it," says Dr. Alexander. "In Berkeley, of all places, who would expect that?"

Low birth weights have been linked to health complications and chronic conditions later in life, including diabetes, heart disease, and high blood pressure. Dr. Vicki mobilized her team and the Black Infant Health Program. By 2009, the birth-weight disparity for African-American babies in Berkeley was 2-1, on par with the national average. This successful initiative is just one of the many reasons the Berkeley Community Fund will honor her with the 2017 Benjamin Ide Wheeler Award.

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Behind the Scenes at BCF
New staff, new board members, fresh ideas

We’re building a fantastic team at BCF, preparing to grow and scale our programs to help Berkeley youth complete college and launch their careers. Linda Osuorji, our newest College Success Advisor, joined our staff in July. She works with Lynn Walker, providing support services to our scholars and mentors. Most recently, Linda was a Match Specialist for Big Brothers and Big Sisters of the Bay Area, where she managed a mentor program and facilitated mentor-mentee relationships.

BCF prides itself on being a learning organization that respects the experiences of and engages our scholars in the design and delivery of our programs, so the programs are meaningful, relevant, and relevant to their lives. In July, alumna Fatima Rodriguez-Ortiz (UC Santa Cruz, 2016) joined BCF full-time as the Program Coordinator for our newly launched Promise Program. Program Coordinators for our scholars attending Berkeley City College intern.

Omar Aguilar-Martinez (2015 Scholar) and Bubacarr Kora (2016 Scholar), together with Lynn and Fati, helped develop and lead our transition-to-college workshops this summer. They also organized community-building events, volunteer projects at Habitat for Humanity, and led our annual Tilden Park hike.

Pamela Rodriguez-Ortiz (2015 Scholar) worked on short-term social media and marketing projects and Juan Azaaara (2012 Scholar and recent Cal grad) provided data migration and bookkeeping services. All were employed through Berkeley’s YouthWorks program.

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Our staff, from left: Omar Aguilar-Martinez, Bubacarr Kora, Joleen Ruffin, Linda Osuorji, Lynn Walker, Pamela Rodriguez-Ortiz and Fatima Rodriguez-Ortiz.

Keeping services up. All were employed through Berkeley’s YouthWorks program.

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Summertime fun at Habitat for Humanity

Our Newest Scholars Envision their Future

Your support of our 2017 scholarship recipients helps close opportunity gaps

Guadalupe Acevedo’s eyes light up when she shares her plans to become an emergency room physician. The first-year student at UC Santa Cruz found a clear sense of direction while interning with Kaiser Permanente’s KP Launch, a program that gives youth practical work experience and the opportunity to learn directly from health care professionals. Harlan Brawer enthusiastically describes his lab work with drosophila at UC Berkeley, where he honed his research skills while attending Berkeley High. He’s headed to UCLA with plans to explore science and engineering courses before choosing a major. Throughout high school, Alexis Fuentes immersed himself in creative writing and coding. The Cal State East Bay freshman aspires to be a software engineer. So does Midoth Throner, who participated in iCLEM at Lawrence Berkeley Labs and is now a student at the University of San Francisco. These four Berkeley youth are among the many 2017 High Hopes scholarship recipients pursuing degrees in STEM fields— the largest number since the program began.

High Hopes program started in 2008. Thirteen aspire to work in medical-related professions as physicians, surgeons, nurse practitioners, research scientists or public health educators. The work appeals to their intellect as well as to their desire to help others, a common trait among our scholars.

Changing the world for the better is also on the minds of our 2017 scholars pursuing degrees in other fields. Ceara Simmonds, who interned in Congresswoman Barbara Lee’s office, is studying urban planning at UC San Diego. Raymundo Saldana, a UC Berkeley freshman who developed an interest in education while volunteering in kindergartens, classrooms, is thinking about a career teaching history, as a platform to encourage young Latinos to pursue higher education.


 did you know?

- In 2015, the median income for Berkeley adult males with only a high school diploma was $26,500 compared to $50,800 for those with a bachelor’s degree and $75,000 for those with a graduate degree.
- The median income for Berkeley adult females with only a high school diploma was $29,000 compared to $41,300 for those with a bachelor’s degree and $53,000 for those with a graduate degree.

High GPA donors, who par Excellence in Berkeley:

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Berkeley’s YouthWorks program.

Teenage girls and boys in Berkeley earn an extra $14,500 for those with a bachelor’s degree and $53,000 for those with a graduate degree.

Help Berkeley youth succeed on their path through college.

berkfund.org/donate

Berkeley Foundation.

With Amigos de las Americas and Global Glimpse during high school, Nia Byrd and Andrea Lewis, now studying at Bowdoin College and Lewis and Clark College, intend to work for the U.S. Foreign Service or international organizations. Emily Yu, a first-year student at San Diego State, plans to be a public defender.

Our support of these High Hopes scholars ultimately creates a more inclusive society. They might be the change makers who work on solutions to issues that affect their community, who develop products relevant to their lives, and who represent our diverse country.

Along the way, you’re enabling them to focus more on their studies and to stress less about how to afford expensive textbooks and computers, pay for food and transportation costs, and, for some, health insurance or rent. Thank you for joining our efforts to make the world a better place.

“Behind the Scenes at BCF”

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