



**Karyn Baumann (right) mentored senior Denise Tupper and served as the senior class leader in 2009.**

We were sitting around discussing what criteria the students might use in deciding which college to attend when one of the students jokingly said, "I'll go to a school if they will let me bring my mentors with me." Of course this was said in jest, yet it epitomizes the relationships students and

Minds Matter mentors have. Three years ago, Minds Matter of Portland was launched. For those mentors who were there the first day it was the complete unknown.

Two mentors were matched with a student in the hopes that a bond would grow over time that would

lead to the ultimate goal – acceptance to a four year university or college.

I did not imagine what a journey this would be, both for the mentors and the students.

On paper, it seemed clear enough – meeting every Saturday during the school year, discussing topical issues (What's Going on in Our World) and helping the students get accepted to summer programs their sophomore and junior year, and then a four year university for seniors.

What none of us realized that initial day is just how much this would change all of us, and how the relationships would come to mean so much. I remember receiving e-mails and letters that first summer.

As one student put it, "I'm having the time of my life and would never have been able to do it without you. You won't believe how much my writing has improved when you see me this fall! Thank you for all your help."

I remember how proud I felt when I heard a once shy student speak passionately to an auditorium full of new students and parents about her summer programs and the impact it had made.

I'm thrilled to see my mentee off to college this fall. It's an exciting moment for both of us, and I realize how much I'll miss our weekly contact. Over this three years, I have definitely learned as much as she did!"



Minds Matter of Portland, Inc.  
PO Box 820023  
Portland, OR 97282  
portland@mindsmatter.org

## Minds Matter

*A not-for-profit organization that brings high-achieving and motivated high school students from low-income families together with dedicated mentors to achieve academic excellence and expand educational horizons.*



# Minds Matter

of Portland, Inc.  
the newsletter

Senior Special Edition June 2009

## First Full Class Graduates from Minds Matter of Portland All Ten Seniors Headed to College with Substantial Financial Aid



**Graduation Day: Minds Matter seniors (from left) Quinton Blanton, Denise Tupper, Alexandria Marshall, Akela Auer, Mimi Gomalo, Lynn Liu, Tina Tan, Vivin Liang**

Three years after its founding, Minds Matter of Portland, Inc. celebrates the graduation of its first full class of seniors.

The success of a non-profit is based upon its ability to stay true to its mission and achieve measurable goals.

Minds Matter Portland, Inc. is an academic support program for high-achieving, low-income high school students. The goal of the program is

to help these students prepare for college and assist them in gaining admission to a four-year college or university and in obtaining the needed funds to pay for their education.

Minds Matter Portland accepted its first students in 2006, and was patterned after a national program with a strong track record of success. Students are nominated in their freshman year and go through a rig-

orous application process. If they are accepted into the program, these students commit to meeting every Saturday from 10 am till 2:30 pm during the school year throughout their 10th, 11th and 12th grade years.

On those Saturdays they receive two hours of academic tutoring and test prep, lunch, and spend two hours with adult mentors (two mentors for every student) who become their friends and guides through their high school to college transition.

Over 130 adult volunteers weekly support approx 45 students. The culmination of their work in their Sophomore and Junior years is attendance at a summer program on a college campus. Individual and corporate donations finance whatever tuition the students do not receive in financial aid from the schools.

Senior students focus on applying to and paying for college.

The ten seniors graduating from Minds Matter Portland are all college bound and have received substantial financial aid packages. Here's a profile of each student (with color commentary from Graham Covington, MM executive director):

*continued on page 3*

# Writing Lessons

## College Essays Demonstrate Seniors' Improvements

College-level writing skills is one major focus of the Minds Matter program. From the first day they join the program, students work on their vocabulary and grammar skills. The best way to demonstrate the effectiveness of this is to share some stories written by MM students as part of their college applications.

### Common Application: short answer, extracurricular activity

#### Quinton Blanton

The crowd of middle-school students wiggled in their seats. Some looked very uncomfortable and others were giggling before we even started our presentation. Discussion about AIDS/HIV gets reactions all over the spectrum.

I was at Tubman Middle School as part of my internship through the Multnomah County Health Department. The program is called Empowerment Through Education, and over the course of this year we will reach over 200 middle- and high-school students.

A group of my peers and I travel to several inner-city high schools to spread knowledge about responsible sex. While we're at the school, we facilitate student participation in workshops, role plays, and scenarios that promote safe sex.

It's a satisfying experience because I am planting seeds of knowledge in my community and investing in youth. It's good to know that a few less students are under the impression you can contract AIDS from petting the cat of an infected person.

### Common Application: personal statement

#### Denise Tupper

I sat on the old, torn leather seat, breathing through my mouth, an old trick I had picked up after many years of riding public transportation. I watched

two girls get on the bus and take the seat in front of me. Cautiously, I took a whiff. I smelled the newest Mary Kate and Ashley perfume.

I inhaled a bit deeper, and was pleasantly surprised by what wasn't in the air. I recalled a prior trip on Tri-Met. I was sitting alone in the window seat, mindlessly staring out the window when I smelled the strong scent of someone who had not seen soap and water for days, and who had recently hit a bar or liquor store, as the smell of alcohol seeped out of his pores. There the two of us were—me on my way home from school and him, already passed out in the seat next to me, going who knows where. This wasn't an uncommon occurrence.

I glanced at the two girls in front of me again. They were chatting away, spread out in the large seat with room to spare. Me? As usual, I had scooted all the way up against the window, trying to take up as little space as possible and leave room for another passenger. The two girls in front of me didn't seem too concerned about taking up space.

I wondered if I'd ever get to that place, where I automatically breathed through my nose and felt comfortable putting my bag on the seat next to me.

Then my days of riding the public bus to school ended.

I lived on the fault line between Portland and Clackamas for years. I'd like to say I'd never dreamed what a big difference moving would make, but somewhere in the back of my mind, I think I knew. When we moved five blocks, my world seemed upside down. To avoid changing schools in the middle of the year, I continued to ride public

transportation to my old school. But waking up so early and walking a quarter of a mile to the bus stop every day was hard, especially in the rainy Northwest. So I decided to attend the neighborhood school.

This meant for the first time in my life I was the new kid. Instead of freeways and byways, I had sidewalks and side streets. Instead of waiting for buses that never ran on time and were always crowded, I got to sleep in and get to school on time, as the school bus picked me up and dropped me off right in front of my house.

My new house was right on the border of Portland in a place aptly named "Happy Valley." I was now attending the Sunrise Middle School, which was closer geographically but seemed like a completely different world to me. I dreaded walking into the cafeteria the first time, but I didn't feel I had a choice. A girl has to eat, or at least this one did.

I decided it would be best to just get it over with, and quickly walked from my fourth-period class to the cafeteria, which was already packed with kids—kids who I didn't know. Kids who didn't look like me or dress like me and who probably had never had to take more than one bus to get to school in their entire lives.

I sat down at the table closest to the door, quietly eating my turkey sandwich and gazing at the clock. How much longer until this ended? I was about to leave when two girls I recognized from my English class asked if they could join me. I took a deep breath, moved my bag from the chair next to me, and said, "Of course."



#### Akela Auer

Jefferson High School

**Summer Programs:**

Columbia University

(creative writing)

**Bound for:** George Washing-

ton University

**Declared major:** media studies, graphic design or communication

**Graham says:** "Akela exhibits initiative and adaptability. She's smart, acerbic, articulate, versatile and a little stubborn. She was the first Minds Matter student to enroll in her sophomore year."



#### Quinton Blanton

Jefferson High School

**Bound for:** George Fox

University

**Declared major:**

international relations or non-profit business management

**Graham says:** "Quinton is a capable and resourceful young man. As an anecdote affirming his initiative, Portland experienced the biggest snow storm in recorded history in December. Quinton, not wanting to miss the Minds Matter Saturday class, trudged through the snow like Dr. Zhivago. He was the only student to reach class. He did so to work on his college applications."



#### Mimi Gomalo

Grant High School

**Summer Programs:**

Georgetown University

(college prep) & UC

San Diego (civics)

**Bound for:** University of Oregon Honors

College

**Declared major:** pre-med

**Graham says:** "Mimi is gregarious, enthusiastic, and self-reliant. She also exhibits maturity beyond her years. Through her MM summer experiences she gained the confidence in her ability to adapt to unfamiliar circumstances and changing conditions."



#### Lynn Liu

Marshall High School

**Summer Programs:** Putney

School Vermont (photog-

raphy) & UCLA (public

speaking)

**Bound for:** Portland State University

**Declared major:** architecture, interior design, art, photography, bio-engineering or math

**Graham says:** "Lynn exhibits spunk and perseverance. As a Chinese emigrant, Lynn speaks fluent Mandarin and has made impressive strides in her conversational and written English."

# Graduate Profiles

continued from page 1



#### Miranda Hardy

Lincoln High School

**Summer Programs:**

Smith College (engineer-

ing) and Bryn Mawr

(college writing)

**Bound for:** Santa Clara University

**Declared major:** acoustic engineering

**Graham says:** "Miranda exhibits poise, curiosity, self-confidence, and an abundant sense of humor. She is an excellent writer, public speaker, and raconteur and was recognized by her high school peers and named Rose Princess."



#### Vivian Liang

David Douglas High

School

**Summer Programs:**

Stanford University (re-

search writing) & Harvard

University (Shakespeare)

**Bound for:** Sarah Lawrence College

**Declared major:** marketing or writing

**Graham says:** "Vivian exhibits resourcefulness, dependability, wit, and adaptability beyond her years. She was recognized as the best Minds Matter creative writer by award-winning author, Larry Colton, for her depiction of Jackie Robinson's ground-breaking debut into Major League Baseball."



#### Brittnie Marcell

Jefferson High School

**Summer Programs:**

USC (dance) & Cornell

University (business admin-

istration)

**Bound for:** USC

**Declared major:** dance or psychology

**Graham says:** "Brittnie is articulate, and an accomplished public speaker. She was chosen to represent her high school and Minds Matter in addressing the Portland School Board regarding pending changes within the school system. Brittnie's leadership qualities distinguish her. She is focused and disciplined and brings a trademark sense of humor to any task."



#### Alexandria Martin

Jefferson High School

**Summer Programs:**

Cheshire Academy Con-

necticut (college prep) & UC

Berkeley (public speech)

**Bound for:** St. Johns

**Declared major:** psychology or nursing

**Graham says:** "Alexandria exhibits resilience, determination, quick wit, and perseverance. She excels in her high school and takes the lead in several community service activities, including grade school mentoring, nursing home volunteering, and various food, blood, and clothing drives. She continually strives to improve."



#### Tina Tan

Madison High School

**Summer Programs:**

UC Berkeley (health care)

& Dartmouth (Gracias

Program in Spain)

**Bound for:** University of Oregon

**Declared major:** pre-med

**Graham says:** "Tina exhibits poise, persistence, and maturity beyond her years. Minds Matter encourages a world view, and many of our students speak English as a second language. Tina speaks fluent Mandarin. In an effort to broaden her language skills, Tina attended Dartmouth's summer program in Spain. Tina returned with new international friendships and a keener interest in the world around her. She hopes to use her multilingual skills as a doctor."



#### Denise Tupper

Madison High School

**Summer Programs:**

Putney School Vermont

(writing intensive) & Bryn

Mawr (college writing)

**Bound for:** Scripps College

**Declared major:** writing or environmental studies

**Graham says:** "Denise takes on tasks with thoughtfulness and enthusiasm. Her perfect attendance at MM for three years is a prime example of her commitment to success. It's no surprise that Smith, Bryn Mawr, Lewis and Clark, Oberlin and Scripps were vying to have her choose their school, as she is a tremendous contributor in all she does."

To help fund a student's experience at Minds Matter, please visit our website at [www.mindsmatter.org/chapters/portland](http://www.mindsmatter.org/chapters/portland).