

MINDS MATTER OF BOSTON – MAKHISSA DAMBA

Mike Carosi and Amanda Frier were extremely proud, but not the least bit surprised, when they read the glowing review on Phillips Academy Andover letterhead: “Makhissa, with her calm, pleasant demeanor, her sense of humor, and her social and intellectual curiosity, has been a pleasure to have at Phillips Academy this summer.” Having mentored Makhissa for a full year, they already knew that she was a gifted young woman destined for great things.

Makhissa spent the first 13 years of her life in Guinea, where she enjoyed school and mastered both French and the local dialect. However, it wasn’t until she moved to Dorchester, Massachusetts, with her mother and three brothers and sisters in 2002 that she began the daunting task of mastering her third language, English. Makhissa tackled this project with her usual enthusiasm and intelligence, earning excellent grades at Boston Community Leadership Academy while actively participating in a number of school activities including tutoring classmates and participating in a student-run dance program.

Determined to become the first in her family to graduate from college, Makhissa applied to Minds Matter at the end of her sophomore year. While her grades and recommendations were very impressive, it was her openness, positive attitude and personality that most impressed her mentors during her first sessions with Minds Matter. “Makhissa’s drive and intelligence were evident from day one,” shared Mike Carosi. “She is great to work with and it has been amazing watching her grow over the course of the year. She has become more expressive and confident, and is developing into a strong leader.” Makhissa approached her Minds Matter activities with characteristic zeal and dedication. With the help of her mentors, she improved her standardized test scores, gained admission to several quality summer programs, and began addressing one of her fears – public speaking.

Never one to avoid a challenge, Makhissa decided to confront the commonly held fear of public speaking head-on during her summer program at Phillips Academy. In addition to an economics class, she enrolled in ESL Speak Up which included activities such as performing movie scripts, writing dialogues and scripts for real-world situations, composing short essays, and delivering original speeches. It was clear that her hard work had paid off when she made her final speech on landscape photography to an audience including her entire class, multiple teachers, and a representative from the local museum. Her instructor noted, “As she gave her speech that day, I could see the improvements in her speaking ability: she had more confidence, good audibility, appropriate pace, and proper accent.” In addition to the praise, Makhissa received a rating of High Honors in this demanding course.

Maxine Grogan, Dean of Admission at Andover, wrote to Minds Matter, “Here is a snapshot of a young student who has experienced a unique opportunity made possible by your committed efforts. Thank you for all of your help in bringing this fine student to Andover.” Working with Makhissa, like working with all of the talented students at Minds Matter, was our pleasure. And we look forward to continuing to work with her as she prepares for continued success in college and beyond.