DEVELOPING BORN LEADERS

Program pushes teen to reach his potential.

BY LORI SKYES

Max Anthony Knowles wanted a chance. A chance to work with his fellow classmates, develop leadership skills and help his community.

But with a past that strained from the straight and narrow, his opportunities were limited.

The chance finally came last year, when Knowles was a senior at St. Stanislaus High School. His senior year was dedicated to helping the children of the homeless.

“I knew where I wanted to be, but I had no idea how to get there,” said Knowles, 18. “ASPIRA gave me an opportunity to develop into the person I wanted to be.”

With programs in 11 Broward County middle and high schools, ASPIRA provides advisories to mentor students. Through one-on-one interaction and group counseling, the students receive help with youth leadership development, tutoring and career planning.

ASPIRA also encourages community service projects, helps students prepare for college and teaches them about sexually transmitted diseases.

“Every group in the region is dedicated to helping the kids,” Knowles said. “That teaches us to take ownership in the club.”

Now a freshman at Florida International University majoring in international business, Knowles travels around the country as a marketing manager with a telecommunications franchise. He also teaches guitar, piano, drums and bass at a music school he started a few years ago.

Knowles is a member of the ASPIRA student organization and was selected by the school as the ASPIRA student of the year.

“Max saw the opportunity, so he jumped at it,” said Robert Amaya, ASPIRA advisor at St. Stanislaus High School.

Knowles helped organize community service projects such as playground cleanups and the Blanket the Streets, in which ASPIRA members collect and donate sweaters, blankets, jackets and other clothing to homeless shelters.

“Max has a way to motivate a crowd,” said Amaya.

Knowles received a $1,600 scholarship from ASPIRA and was named one of the 100 ASPIRANTE of the Year winners.

The award is given to students who best exemplify the ASPIRA value of leadership and are role models to other students.

ASPIRA gave Max a platform to express his leadership skills, through workshops and different forums.

Knowles still talks to Amaya on a regular basis and attends group functions.

“Rafael played an instrumental role in my development as a teenager,” Knowles said. “During his years, he can relate to me.”

His father said he knows a lot of parents who are struggling with their teenagers.

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His father said he knows a lot of parents who are struggling with their teenagers.

“When he joined ASPIRA, it was a major metamorphosis,” Max Knowles said. “We knew his capabilities, but with all the influences, we didn’t know which way he was going to end up. We were grateful to have that opportunity. It was a godsend for us.”

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ON TRACK: Max Anthony Knowles, 19, and a group of St. Stanislaus High School seniors, travel around the county as a marketing manager. Staff photo/Rudy Sloan Reich

Mentor program cultivates young leaders

"We already had the students... but we were missing a leader. Max saw the opportunity, so he jumped at it."

RAFAEL AMAYA

ASPIRA ADVISOR AT ST. STANISLAUS HIGH SCHOOL

In addition to the ASPIRA fund, other organizations that support community service projects include the Boys & Girls Clubs of America, the United Way, Planned Parenthood and the American Red Cross.

The agency spotlighted today, ASPIRA Florida Inc., wants to help more than the agency’s leadership development program.

The agency’s leadership development program is a key component of its mission to help students reach their full potential.

The agency’s leadership development program provides students with opportunities to develop strong leadership skills, gain experience in community service and become role models to others.

ASPIRA’s goal is to help students reach their full potential.

“The agency’s leadership development program is a key component of its mission to help students reach their full potential,” Amaya said.

Knowles has been a role model since he was a child. He learned the importance of hard work and determination.

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