During the summer of 2010, the Brooklyn Health Disparities Center (BHDC) and the Arthur Ashe Institute for Urban Health's (AAAIUH) Health Science Academy welcomed the first group of high school students to its four week Health Disparities Summer Internship Program.

The program, designed to expose students to real health issues facing minority communities and simultaneously introduce them to the work of community health workers and health advocates, accepted 51 students from high schools across Brooklyn.

These students represented the brightest minds of their academic institutions and were fully committed to pursuing health careers.

Already exposed to classes in Anatomy, Neurology, and Physiology offered through the Institute’s Health Science Academy (HSA), these students were prepared to enhance their academic experience with real world community based experience!

Through the Health Disparities Summer Internship Program (HDSIP), the students were placed at well established community organizations that shared a passion for improving the health of Brooklyn communities. For four weeks, during the summer, these students learned about health disparities from experienced health professionals, researchers and health advocates. At their job placements, they applied what they were learning to their internships and presented their research projects at a special event at Borough Hall attended by Brooklyn Borough President Marty Markowitz and Deputy Borough President, Yvonne Graham!
Gaining work experience by participating at the community organizations was the second favored aspect of the program (25.4%), followed by meeting new people (12%).

“What’s Next?”

Research has shown that minority researchers and physicians tend to serve their own communities (Bach et al, 2004). Increasing the overall representation of minority groups in health care professions will have a positive effect on the quality of care in our neighborhoods; and fostering the interest of our high school interns in medicine, research and advocacy will translate in improved health outcomes for our communities.

After completing the HDSIP, the numbers of students who were either very/extremely interested in a career in minority health care increased by 18.7%. Furthermore, when surveyed on how they intended to apply their experience from their summer internship, the most common responses were:

- To use in school/apply to future research ideas
- Educate/help different neighborhoods
- Research own community

What a Difference 3 weeks can make!

The responses from the community based organizations regarding the interns, have been overwhelming! Whether it was conducting research on childhood obesity in central Brooklyn, completing a community mapping of domestic violence incidence in East New York & Bedford-Stuyvesant, the community-based organizations that worked with our interns found the student projects useful in advancing the work of their organizations! Here are some of their comments:

“One of the things they did, they helped develop the agency’s “Facebook” page. The number of “friends” listed on the page increased considerably thanks to their work.”

Haitian Centers Council (2010)

“Having the interns provided a new perspective on the issues facing our community. We have added two (2) new program initiatives this year that specifically focus on teens & young adults...”

Caribbean Women’s Health Association Inc. (2010)