



SERVING ALBANY'S OPPORTUNITY YOUTH



Elista Gayle, WAGE Center Case Manager was a facilitator at the first ever Hospitality Academy hosted by My Brother and Sister's Keeper (MBSK) in conjunction with the City of Albany. Instruction focuses on, "Providing young adults successful tools to transition to work and career..." including an interview process preceding hospitality internships at local hotels.

The Albany City School District website describes the MBSK initiative as follows: "The City of Albany MBSK will focus on 'opportunity youth'

which generally includes young people who have dropped out of school or are unemployed or under-employed. The goal: improving access to education and employment and reducing levels of violence among young people."

Elista's role at Hospitality Academy was to impart "interpersonal, technology, workplace problem solving skills and employment literacy" to young adults with changing responsibilities now that high school is in the rear view mirror. She says, "I believe the most successful part was getting past some communication barriers and age barriers." The participants were given the opportunity to see how to transition from challenging situations to become responsible young adults.

After establishing a connection, "they could see the investment they had to make in themselves." The classroom discussion and activities gave the participants, "the opportunity to see themselves in a different light." Although it was a classroom setting, it was not the high school mindset. But rather, an assignment to develop into team members, navigating the program together and learning that they could "see more, do more and stretch," to see new horizons. Elista says, "They have dreams and aspirations, but there is a learning curve on the path." She says the participants began to internalize the idea of "personal branding." They were able to question themselves in terms of "what impression do you leave upon someone?"

Most importantly, Elista says she wanted to leave this concept with the young adults: "I want you to know that you have a purpose and destiny. Whatever you think of yourself you will produce." She says that was reinforced through the atmosphere created by Deputy Commissioner Tucker and Director Elizabeth Harris, who provided constant inspiration and encouragement to the participants.

At the conclusion of classroom instruction, the participants begin an interviewing and internship phase where they learn hospitality specific skills in Albany hotels. The hope is that some land jobs in the industry and or seek more education in the field and define a direction for career growth and self-reliance.