



Host Families and GABC Scholars Cherish Enduring Bonds Over the Years

When a new scholar comes to the Guilford ABC house, she is matched with a local family who have volunteered to share their family life during the high school years. While each girl currently spends one Friday-Saturday overnight each month at the home of her host family, the GABC girls and their host family members often report that their relationships deepen and their bonds continue over many years, long after graduation.

Valerie Price Cornelious came from Boston to Guilford ABC in 1974 in the very first group of scholars. She says of her host “mother” Gretchen MacKenzie: “It’s been over 50 years since I came to the program and met Gretchen. We’ve stayed in contact all this time. She’s been a stalwart in the program, and a wonderful host parent to me and to other scholars over the years.”



Valerie, Gretchen, and Cheryl

Valerie remembers how wonderful it was to get together with GABC alums and Gretchen, a few years ago, to attend one of the scholars’ weddings in Manhattan. “It was a special time for the entire group, as we all have a special bond with her. Gretchen’s warm presence helped ease the transition to Guilford, and all the scholars who got to know her really appreciated her for that. Even now I can call Gretchen about anything! We pick up right where we left off. I felt Gretchen was always looking out for me and the other scholars in such a warm and caring way. That’s why I always enjoyed being in the MacKenzie home. The whole family always made me feel comfortable.”

Cheryl Harvey McPherson also entered the GABC program in 1974 and experienced two host families, the Pleasure family and the Ghilardi family. She loved getting to know host brother Morris Pleasure, “who is such a successful keyboard musician!” Morris has often returned to Guilford to perform on several GABC anniversaries for the community as well. His father was principal of A.W. Cox Elementary School. Cheryl said that this Black family helped her “further integrate into the community.”

Her experiences with the Ghilardi family have continued through the years. “I’m still in touch with their



Kyra with the DePetrakis family

daughter, Debra-Anne Myers. Mrs. Jackie Ghilardi was just fantastic. In June 1977, six of my family members – my father Kenneth, mother Alberta, siblings Darren and Teresa, plus three nieces from Philadelphia – celebrated my graduation with me. The Ghilardis generously hosted all of us at their farm. She was a great hostess, very embracing.”

Both GABC graduates spoke of the “solid foundation the host families and the program gave us, with so many people supporting us.” Cheryl mentioned that acclimating to the academic expectations and having to be “kind of perfect,” was “a growing process” that the host families helped them navigate all the way to graduation in 1977.

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P.O. Box 140
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www.guilfordabc.org



A Season of Renewal & Fresh Beginnings

FROM PRESIDENT NANCY PATTON

Spring is a season of renewal and fresh beginnings. For the Guilford ABC community, it is an especially meaningful time of transition and celebration. Our two seniors are preparing to graduate from Guilford High School and making important decisions about where they will continue their education this fall. At the same time, our Student Selections Committee is thoughtfully completing the process of identifying the next scholars who will enter our program as freshman in the coming year.



Personally, this season also marks the conclusion of my term as Board President. It is a natural moment for reflection and gratitude. Serving in this role has given me a firsthand view of the extraordinary partnership that sustains our mission. Our engaged board, dedicated staff, committed volunteers, scholar families, host families, Guilford High School staff, community partners and generous donors each play an essential role. It takes all of us working together to provide a high-quality educational experience and life-changing opportunities our scholars deserve.

I have witnessed the powerful impact of this collective effort on six remarkable high school students. Each of them brings unique talents, aspirations, and determination. Through your support, they have received the academic guidance, mentorship, enrichment opportunities, and encouragement needed to succeed in school and to develop leadership skills, confidence and resilience that will serve them for a lifetime.

As I prepare to pass the leadership of the Board to new hands, I am confident that our program is strong, our mission is clear, and our students continue to thrive because of your faithful commitment. Thank you for the continued investment you make in the lives of these students. ▼

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A current host family, the DePetrakis family, have been hosting GABC scholar Kyra who is graduating this year from Guilford High School.

"Hosting Kyra has felt very natural," said host mom Mags DePetrakis. "Our daughter Mainey was leaving for college when Kyra came to us as a freshman," joining two sons, Braden and Quincy, and another daughter Tayte, also a senior ready to graduate this year.

Mags was actually not familiar with Guilford ABC when a GABC Board member commented that the DePetrakis family would be a great host family. The DePetrakis family then pursued the opportunity.

As a host family, Mags said "we try to create a place for sharing struggles, being supportive of her efforts, helping with college applications and visits. We wanted Kyra to be more a part of our family. We love her sensitivity, social awareness, and emotional intelligence."

In addition to having Kyra join their family, Mags said "we've loved getting to know Kyra's family – her mother Leila is amazing! My favorite time is when Kyra's family comes to visit us, for her Voices performances and plays – such a joy to be together, we two mutual moms. Kyra is dynamic thanks to her mother Leila who is beautiful inside and out. We've enjoyed extending that love Kyra already felt from her family."

The DePetrakis family has also welcomed other GABC scholars to their home for parties and other events. "This is what a family does," she said.

"Over these nearly four years, it's been a beautiful thing to get to know Kyra, and we'll miss her when she goes to college – we hope she often pops in!" ▼

Interested in becoming a host family? We'd love to hear from you!

Please contact Elisa Milano:
elisa.milano0520@gmail.com

Scholars Enjoy IB and AP Classes, Host Family Fun & Travel in Italy

Kyra is finding her fourth year with her host family filled with "experiencing new things with them. I've loved going to hockey games, out to dinner, and to New York City, as well as just hanging out with the DePetrakis family." She reports "time management" as her biggest challenge this year, what with filling out college applications and focusing on "hard" classes but says "this year has been going very well, really fun."

Sophomore Lakeesha feels "very integrated" into the GABC house with the support system provided and the other scholars. She had a lot of fun acting out the death scene in Macbeth in her English class, and in her art class has created a fiber arts scarf and a pillow. Lakeesha said she had fun visiting other ABC houses in Connecticut and spending time with her host family. "We went bowling and painted pottery – fun experiences!"

Katie, also a sophomore, is in an honors Spanish class and feeling "really good" about her achievement in the language. She continues in the choir and participates in four clubs: Women & STEM, the Interact (volunteering) Club, Feminist Alliance, and the Mental Health Alliance. Katie also volunteers at St. Raphael Hospital, bringing the book cart to patients and chatting with them. "I find this really meaningful. I like hearing their thoughts, and the patients are very encouraging, very motivational," Katie said.

Jazzy reports that her junior year classes "are going really well – I like the fact that they are challenging.

My favorites are International Baccalaureate Psychology and Advanced Placement Physics." She enjoys "hanging out and relaxing" with her host family and is working on costumes for the GHS musical. She helps with costume fittings and tailoring as she has sewing skills that began when her mother gave her a sewing machine. GHS has a costume collection, and Jazzy works with other students to decide which costume goes with each character.

Irene's junior year includes the important experience as a volunteer at a Yale hospital, working closely with the nursing staff. "This is so helpful for my future career as a nurse," she said. "I'm definitely learning from the nurses – seeing first-hand what they do for the patients." Irene especially enjoys her I.B. course work because "it is interactive – we work in groups and learn from each other." Irene spoke warmly about her host family. "I love going to their house – it's a home away from home. They always give me pep talks and it's just fun, doing whatever in the moment with their two girls."

Senior Tamojah went on a 10-day trip to Italy with her I.B. Italian class, a trip that turned into 13 days due to the February blizzard. It was an intensive immersion Italian language experience that included staying with Italian host families and consistently speaking Italian. The students earned a certificate of achievement for meeting international standards for the course. ▼



Guilford resident and former host family member Kim Greenfeld shared her sewing expertise with the girls.



Escape room and a meal shared with the Glastonbury ABC chapter.



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Julia Antwi-Boasiako

GABC ALUM 2020

CURRENTLY IN THE BRONX, NY

"I recently graduated from NYU with a major in Public Health and Sociology, and a minor in Chemistry. In July, I completed a 9-week pre-medical summer program at the University of North Carolina, where I had the opportunity to take first-year medical school courses. I was honored to receive the highest grade in Gross Anatomy. Currently, I'm based in the Bronx, working part-time as a medical scribe at CityMD Urgent Care while preparing for the MCAT, which I plan to take in January."

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

Shop for Spring and Summer Clothes at Hole in the Wall

After the 2026 very harsh winter, it's time to update your warm weather wardrobe! New merchandise arrives every day at Hole in the Wall, always gently priced and offering great value. The shop is open seven days a week in a shopper-friendly environment. Volunteer staff delight in helping customers find just the right thing.

The shop supports the Guilford A Better Chance program, so your donations of quality clothing, housewares, jewelry, shoes, books and seasonal items are welcome every day. Shop manager Patty Sullivan reports that consignment appointments for late summer and into the fall seasons will be available only from the cancellation list. Prospective consignors should call the shop (203-453-2088) to arrange an appointment. Clothing should be on hangers, in current style and season, clean, pressed and in excellent condition.

Hole in the Wall, Guilford's oldest and only non-profit consignment and thrift shop, is located at 35 Boston Street, across from Ascend Bank in the Boston Commons shopping center. Hours open are Monday

through Friday, 10 am to 5pm; Saturday, 10 am to 4 pm; Sunday, noon to 4 pm.

In 2024, Hole in the Wall celebrated its 50th year of continuous support of Guilford's A Better Chance program. ▼



GABC past-president Georgia Cosgrove (second from left) meets with volunteers.