

Vice volunteer

Highlights of the St. Louis Student Transfer Program

Siblings Thrive in Parkway *Parents' Strategies, Example Provide Solid Foundation*

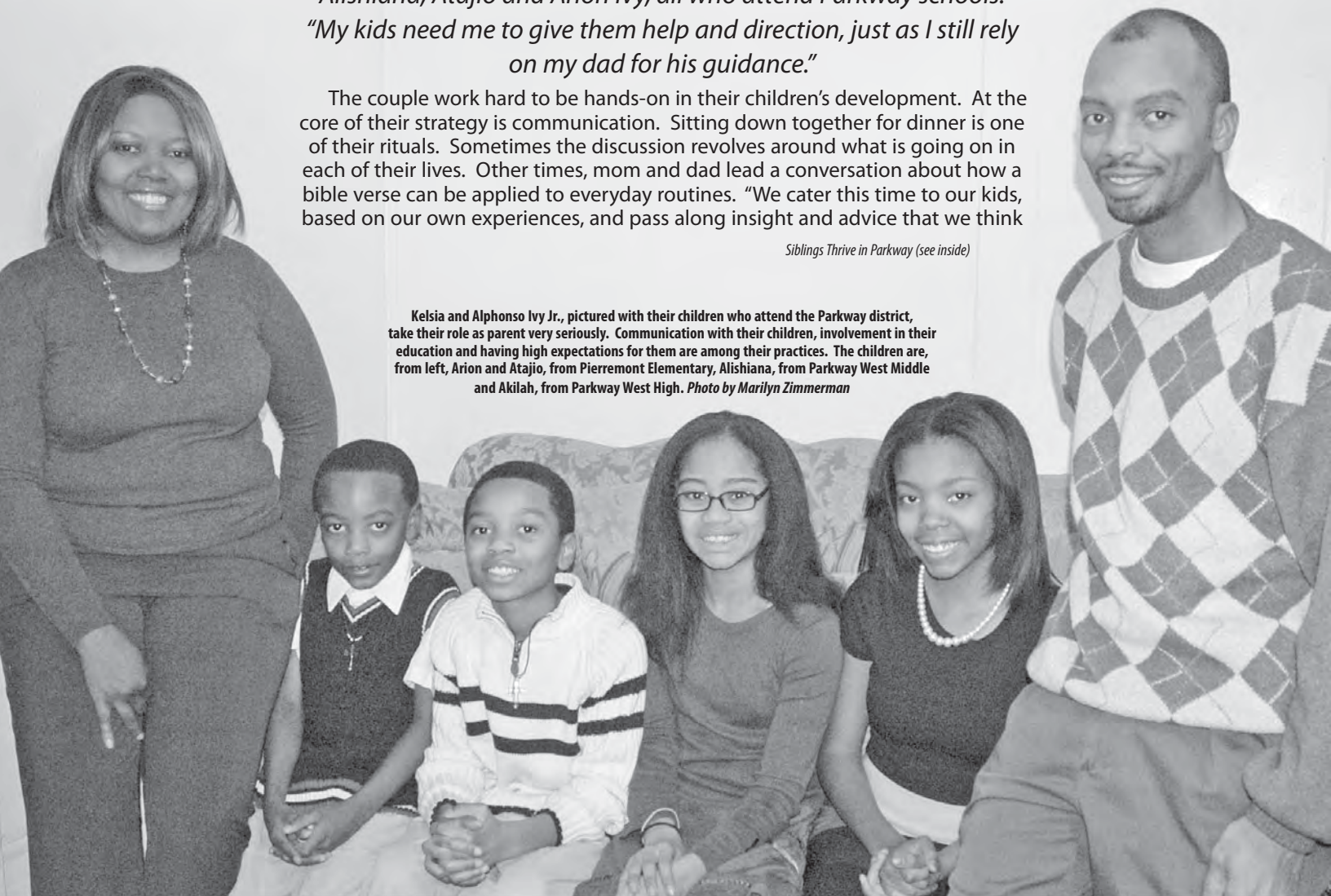
by Peggy Magee

For Kelsia and Alphonso Ivy Jr., their most important job is to be teachers to their children. "It is up to us to provide the training," notes Alphonso, the 36-year-old dad of Akilah Roberts, Alishiana, Atajio and Arion Ivy, all who attend Parkway schools. "My kids need me to give them help and direction, just as I still rely on my dad for his guidance."

The couple work hard to be hands-on in their children's development. At the core of their strategy is communication. Sitting down together for dinner is one of their rituals. Sometimes the discussion revolves around what is going on in each of their lives. Other times, mom and dad lead a conversation about how a bible verse can be applied to everyday routines. "We cater this time to our kids, based on our own experiences, and pass along insight and advice that we think

Siblings Thrive in Parkway (see inside)

Kelsia and Alphonso Ivy Jr., pictured with their children who attend the Parkway district, take their role as parent very seriously. Communication with their children, involvement in their education and having high expectations for them are among their practices. The children are, from left, Arion and Atajio, from Pierremont Elementary, Alishiana, from Parkway West Middle and Akilah, from Parkway West High. Photo by Marilyn Zimmerman



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Siblings Thrive in Parkway (continued)

would have been valuable to us at their age," reports Kelsia.

The couple stress that they have high expectations for their children, who range in age from 8 to 15. Possessing good character is a high priority. Academic performance is also taken very seriously. "We expect A's and B's," says Kelsia, adding, "C's are tolerated, but D's and F's are not." The children are aware of the consequences when they do not measure up.

But there is little confusion about what is expected. "We continually remind them," explains Kelsia, both verbally and by flyers of affirmation that they hang throughout their home.

Alphonso and Kelsia know they have done their job right when their child gets a successful result after practicing what they have preached. When their oldest daughter, an experienced dancer, put together a sibling performance of song and dance for a party in mom's honor, the parents encouraged her to put her best foot forward after sensing her reluctance to take the project seriously. It turned out that the director of her dance studio, an invited guest, observed the performance and offered Akilah an opportunity to help out with classroom dance instruction. She was thrilled.

The parents feel especially gratified when their children are so excited that they take ownership of the behavior that resulted in their success. "The positive action then becomes their idea and that is the goal," explains Alphonso.

Drawing on the memories of her childhood shapes the way Kelsia gets involved with the children's school life. "My mother was always there for me but because she had limited knowledge about navigating the education process, I was pretty much on my own in regard to finding out about opportunities and next steps," she says, referring to her education, first in St. Louis Public Schools and then at Parkway West High School, as a voluntary transfer student. (She's a 1992 Parkway graduate.)

Desiring to attend college, she twice attempted to complete the FAFSA (free application for student financial aid), but both times was notified that her application was missing necessary information. She gave up and enlisted in the Army Reserves after a recruiter told her that her service would come with educational benefits. She earned a bachelor's degree in social work from Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville and, most recently, a master's degree in business management from Fontbonne University.

Because being involved in their children's lives is their top priority, Kelsia and Alphonso made the decision for Kelsia to leave her traditional 9 to 5 job and work from home, where she now runs a consulting business for not-for-profit organizations. Her more flexible schedule enabled her to jump in and get involved at Pierremont Elementary when her oldest daughter started there 9 years ago. Akilah is now at Parkway West High School and, still, Kelsia remains active at Pierremont for the benefit of her two youngest boys who are now there. Last year, she served as PTO president; this year she is co-president. About her involvement, she says, "If it is important enough for me to send my children there, then it is important for me to be involved."

Although the distance between the Parkway district and the Ivy home in north St. Louis is significant, both parents are pleased that their children are being educated there. Alphonso likes that Parkway offers high academics, plentiful resources and cultural diversity, similar to the schools he attended in Dyersburg, Tenn. From high school, he entered the Navy, and then went on to earn two associate's degrees. Currently employed by AT&T, he will soon begin classes at Fontbonne to complete a business degree. Kelsia believes one of the best features of the VICC program is the "cultural balance" it provides students.

Clearly, the children are blossoming in Parkway. Atajio, a straight A fifth grader at Pierremont, was elected by the student body to serve as a student council officer. Third grader Arion, a hard working student, was nominated by his class to serve as their classroom representative. Sixth grader Alishiana went from crying over her homework to earning all A's. And Akilah has maintained honor roll status throughout her Parkway education.

The goal of Kelsia and Alphonso is that their children become well-rounded adults with bright futures. "We help them understand that how they lead their lives now affects their future," says Kelsia, pointing out that grades affect scholarships for college which impacts job opportunities. Alphonso adds, "We are here to help them avoid pitfalls, whether it be academically, spiritually, culturally or in the job world. It's our job and we take it seriously."

VICC Parents Flock to School Event

Seeing Students' Routine Made Big Hit for All Involved

by Peggy Magee

A special morning designed for VICC families at Forder Elementary School in the Mehlville district was a success from many different perspectives, all which give credence to Principal Scott Clark's belief that "there is no substitute for getting parents into the school."

For parents, it was especially appealing because "it allowed us to put ourselves in our kids shoes,"

reports Stephanie Glass. For this mom of two Forder students, what made this early fall activity special was the opportunity to ride the bus to school with her children and attend class with them.

"I like that the school came up with something different," she said, adding, "It was nice that the focus was about experiencing a typical day in their school life and not about grades or progress." She believes that based on the how much the parents and kids enjoyed the program, it should be replicated by other schools.

The idea of "Day in the Life of Forder School" was conceived by Cassandra Griffin, grandma of VICC student Justin Griffin, who thought it would be a good way for Forder parents to learn more about the school and to build relationships with the staff. "I saw it as a great way to bridge the gap between home and school. When parents and teachers work as a team, the children benefit."

So Griffin took her idea to VICC executive director David Glaser. Thinking her idea had merit, he arranged a meeting with Principal Clark so that the three of them could discuss implementation details. Once the event was planned, Clark and Griffin,

together, made phone calls from his office, via speaker phone, to all of Forder's VICC families, inviting them to the event and stressing how much parent involvement positively impacts student achievement. Each family then received a follow-up letter about how the day would roll out. (See the morning's schedule at right.)

Twenty out of the 22 transfer students at Forder had a parent at school that day. Third grader Keon Henry had both his mother and father in attendance. "Just seeing the smile on my son's face was a reward in and of itself," reports Qiana Henry, noting how thrilled Keon was to have his parents observe his school day routine.

Describing herself as a "PTO parent," Henry explained how this day differed from other events she has attended at Forder: "We saw first hand the teaching style of Keon's

teacher and how she runs the class. It gave us better insight and provided us with ideas on how we can work with him at home."



At a special morning for VICC families, parents joined their children for breakfast and lunch and sat in on their classes. "Day in the Life of Forder" got a thumbs up from school staff, parents and children. "There is no substitute for getting parents into the school," notes Principal Scott Clark. Photo by Marilyn Zimmerman

Teachers such as Debbie Staufenbiel were especially welcoming to parents. She said to student Jai'ryn Pruitt, "Introduce your mom to the class. We love it when parents come. You can come any time."

Principal Clark described the school event as a kids' version of the working parents' "take your child to work" day. "They are really excited to show their parents what they do and to share their successes." This was evident when one student was spotted running down the hallway declaring, "Here's the cafeteria, mom!" Another mom, in the breakfast line, revealed with a chuckle: "My daughter wants to carry my tray for me." The children's enthusiasm translates into pride in their work and wanting to do their best, Clark adds. The benefit for parents, he says, is seeing for themselves the kinds of programs in place to help their students. "That insight leads to more interest and involvement."

The presentation part of the program enabled parents to hear about the school curriculum, as well as services and resources available through the district and the VICC program. It was also a time for meaningful dialogue because Clark asked them what they like best about the school and their suggestions for areas of improvement. "Parents could express ideas and concerns which is always valuable for us to hear," he said.

In terms of tangible results, Clark reports that at parent/teacher conferences, held a week after the event, there was "tremendous" participation by VICC parents. Since then, he's seen an increase in VICC parents visiting the school and participating in the school community. "I think their comfort level has been raised," he explains, pointing out that that previously, parents might have talked to the teacher or himself, where now they seem more at ease with the overall school. "And that makes for a better working relationship."

Clark notes that the cost to implement the program was minimal because there

was adequate space on the bus for parents to ride to school with their child. The VICC paid for the cost of mid-day transportation home which was less than \$100. The school's cost was limited to providing breakfast and lunch for parents.

The principal sums up the event: "It set a positive tone for the school year by renewing old connections and establishing new ones. And there is no better way to do that than face-to-face."

Morning Schedule: Day in the Life of Forder

8:25 a.m.	Parents arrive at school by bus and eat breakfast with their child
8:45-10 a.m.	Participate in classroom activities
10:05-10:25 a.m.	Tour of school conducted by Principal Scott Clark
10:30-11:30 a.m.	Presentation to parents by Principal, VICC CEO and VICC Transportation Operations Manager
11:30-11:55 a.m.	Lunch with child
12 noon	Board bus and travel home

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Forder Principal



Forder second-grader Justin Griffin had both his grandma, Cassandra Griffin, and mom, Tabettha Griffin, at the school's special morning for VICC families. Grandma Griffin, at left, conceived the idea for "Day in Life of Forder" and helped make phone calls encouraging parents to attend. Since the event, VICC parent participation has increased. Photo by Marilyn Zimmerman

Rockwood Education

Equips Student for Lofty Goals

by Peggy Magee

Samantha Clark, 18, has always possessed the internal drive to make something of herself. Yet, were it not for her faith and the foundation set by her Rockwood education, she says she might not be where she is today – enrolled at St. Louis University, focused on entering the criminal justice field in the area of forensics.

As a youngster in Rockwood Schools, beginning at Stanton Elementary, Samantha recalls getting picked on by others on her bus because she lived at a homeless shelter. It was because of that experience of bouncing from one shelter to the next with her mom and brothers that she later vowed to herself, “I do not want my children to endure such circumstances.”

A few years later at Rockwood Summit High, when Samantha was confronted with other personal problems, she reached out to some of her teachers. “I could talk to them about what was bothering me and they would give me advice. I knew I could go to them.” As a member of the Treble Chorale and Concert Choir, she became friends with choir director Angela Rice and came to rely on her support.

The atmosphere in the west St. Louis county district also steered Samantha in a positive direction. “It was a disciplined school environment where the expectation was to follow the rules and if you did not, you knew there would be consequences.”

The 2010 graduate cites the multicultural atmosphere of the district with giving her the opportunity to apply the communication practices her mother had ingrained in her. “I developed interpersonal skills and learned to distinguish when it is appropriate to speak casually and when it is appropriate to be more professional sounding.”

She became more well-rounded, open-minded and forward thinking as a result of programs made available through Rockwood, such as the NCCJ’s ANYTOWN Youth Leadership Institute (a residential summer experience that prepares youth to be leaders and change agents), the UM-St. Louis Bridge Program (combining career research, personal development and academics) and SAGES Academy (a summer program that exposes students to college and empowers them). Her participation in the Bridge program confirmed to her that she should pursue forensics as a career, an area she became interested in after a childhood friend was murdered. SAGES reinforced her aspirations toward college and gave her a heads-up on everything involved with getting there and staying there.

An honor roll student throughout most of high school, Samantha believes the district’s reputation for academic excellence helped her when it came to applying to colleges. “Because it is a recognized school district, coming from Rockwood was helpful in gaining admission to all the colleges I applied to. I like that I had options and was able to choose my college.”

She is thrilled to be at St. Louis University where her tuition is covered through scholarships, grants and loans. She can walk to classes from her home not far from the Fox Theatre. Mainly she is totally absorbed in her studies, but she does make time to serve as executive board member of SLU’s NAACP chapter and participates in activities of the Black Student Alliance. She also hangs out a bit in the Cultural Center on campus.

Samantha continues to hold tight to the priorities she stressed as one of the speakers at Rockwood’s 2010 African-American Awards Night. “Hard work, perseverance and motivation are the key,” she told the crowd of VICC families. And while she concedes that life has its share of rough moments, “It’s what makes us stronger,” she notes.



Samantha Clark, a freshman at St. Louis University, appreciates the caring faculty and disciplined environment in Rockwood schools, as well as the access she had to programs that helped her develop into the well-rounded, conscientious college student she is today. Her positive memories prompted her to wear her Rockwood Summit choir tee shirt for this photo.
Photo by Marilyn Zimmerman

volunteer

A newsletter published by the Voluntary Interdistrict Choice Corporation to spread the word about the positive things happening in the voluntary transfer program and to offer educators a glimpse at innovative programs helping students succeed at area schools.

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Message from the CEO



Time and money. Those are two of the most valuable resources we have to offer as we strive to provide the highest quality education possible. What if I told you that I would personally deposit \$86,400 into your bank account at the beginning of each day with the stipulation that every dollar had to be spent by the end of the day or it would be gone forever? Then the next day I would deposit the same amount again with the same stipulation. That represents the gift of time each one of us is provided every day. We are each given 86,400 seconds of time at the beginning of each day. The question is, will we spend each one of those seconds wisely? Similarly, everyone realizes the financial challenges our

country and our state are experiencing and the effect that is having on educational funding. Demands and expectations have never been higher but the supply of financial resources is limited. Given our limited time and financial resources, doesn't it make sense that we spend those gifts in a manner which will have the greatest positive impact on students?

I recently read an article which identified some of the most significant strategies we can implement which will have the greatest impact on the quality of education that we provide. Letting students know how they are performing through accurate, specific, and timely feedback has been identified as one such key strategy. In fact, I was shocked to read that the impact of such feedback on student achievement is more significant than the socio-economic status of the child. One article in this issue of the Volunteer highlights the importance of regular ongoing feedback to their children as provided by the Ivy family.

Another key strategy of great importance is teachers believing that they are one of the primary causes of excellent student achievement. In fact this study indicated that student learning increases three to five times more when teachers assume they have the opportunity to influence the child's achievement versus when they assume that such causes are from factors beyond their control. Clearly when teachers and administrators and their school staff believe that they can positively influence the success of the children they are serving, it makes a huge difference. A group of parents, family members, teachers, and administrators came together at Forder Elementary School in the Mehlville School District with this confident belief. The result was a "Day in the Life of Forder Elementary School" which had an immediate impact on the confidence of the students and the participation of the parents. More information on this event is included in the Volunteer and I look forward to the opportunity to implement similar events at other schools throughout St. Louis County.

There is a great deal of emphasis on end-of-year test scores but the research is clear that a better strategy is to focus upon assessments early and throughout the school year. This is more important to a child's success! Such assessments enable the teacher to tailor and structure his or her teaching and learning so that it provides the greatest benefit for the students. I know that many teachers and principals use this preliminary assessment data to inform and improve their teaching and their students' learning.

Finally, research is clear that expectations have a significant impact upon learning. Simply stated, when teachers and administrators expect more from the students, they get more; when they expect less, they get less. I realize I am dating myself by using the analogy of the Broadway musical "My Fair Lady." In this play, Eliza Doolittle rose up to be a person worthy of respect when she was treated with respect. Similarly, Samantha Clark describes the high expectations established in the Rockwood School District and how those expectations influenced her success.

We are all faced with a finite amount of time and financial resources but we have the opportunity to use those resources as effectively as possible and truly make a difference in the lives of the students that we serve.

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