

# BROOKLYN NEWS

## DREAMS come true

### 20 beat odds & earn GEDs

BY ERIN DURKIN  
DAILY NEWS STAFF WRITER

CANARSIE RESIDENT Sheila Anderson dropped out of high school after she had her first child at 18 — and health problems left her hospitalized for long stretches.

"I was never in school from being in the hospital," said Anderson, 21. "When I dropped out of school, I was disappointed in myself. . . My goal was always to finish high school, and when I had my children, I really wanted to do it for them."

She finally achieved that dream yesterday — along with 19 students who got their GEDs from Settlement Housing Fund's DREAMS YouthBuild program, overcoming troubles from homelessness to drugs to illness.

"Some young people will never have a chance," former Mayor David Dinkins told the graduates. "You have more than a chance; you have a plan."

Many students come in reading at a fifth- or sixth-grade level, said Paige Bellenbaum, director of community programs for Settlement House. The 10-month Crown Heights program alternates GED classes with hands-on training at the group's affordable housing construction projects.

"You see 19 students who have been able to overcome enormous hardships in their lives, who very well might have ended up on the street," she said.

Anderson said she tried another GED program, but struggled



Graduates celebrate at Brown Memorial Baptist Church yesterday after receiving certificates from D.R.E.A.M.S. Youthbuild, a GED program sponsored by the Settlement Housing Fund. Photo by Linda Rosier/Daily News

because she was in and out of the hospital, and was asked to leave when she got pregnant again.

But at DREAMS, she said, teachers wouldn't let her fail, helping her balance classes with sickle-cell treatments and raising two toddlers.

"When I got sick, they would bring my work to the hospital," said Anderson, who plans to go to LaGuardia Community College in the fall and study to become a nurse.

"I wasn't going to make this mistake again," she said. "I want [my daughters] to know that [just] because I have an illness, I'm not going to let it stop me."

Donovan Bruce, 19, dropped out of Sheepshead Bay High School two years ago — soon after his family was evicted from their apartment and had to move into a homeless shelter after his mom was laid off.

He got three straight suspensions from school for fighting before he stopped going altogether.

"I was just angry at the world," he said. "I stopped trusting people."

Now he's planning to start college in the fall, and said the work on construction sites inspired him to pursue a career in engineering. "I really like science," he

said. "I want to know how they make all these things and where they come from, — the actual materials they use."

Gideon Alexander, 18, was just months away from graduating high school in his native Trinidad when his parents moved him to New York — where he found out his credits wouldn't transfer and he would have to start from scratch at Boys and Girls High School.

He left discouraged — but yesterday he graduated as DREAMS' valedictorian.

"I'm feeling great," he said. "Today's a day I've been looking forward to for so many years."