

From the Classroom to the Boardroom By Alice Levine

The Byram Hills Senior Internship Program began May 3rd, and students are already getting a taste of life in the real world. Under the direction of Bob Croke, a social studies teacher at Byram Hills High School, and Melissa Stahl, Assistant Principal, seniors spend the last six weeks of their school year working without pay, at jobs of their choice. Students first meet with Mr. Croke for approval of their respective jobs, and when they need direction in choosing or finding a job, Mr. Croke and Ms. Stahl are available to help.

Each student meets with his advisor on a weekly basis; the advisors are teachers at the high school who are also involved in the program. Current student jobs include interning at CBS News, working for a judge at Westchester County Court in White Plains, and even volunteering at Peace Makers in Jerusalem! For the most part, students work in the Westchester County area, while some make the daily commute to the city.

The program began twelve years ago, and remained optional for the first five years. As it became increasingly popular, it was adopted by Principal Bill Donohue as a standard part of the Byram Hills High School curriculum. Students must work a thirty- hour week, and keep daily journals of their experiences on the job. The program culminates with a final presentation by each student to a panel of teachers and peers, during the week of June 14th. Ms. Stahl explained that the main goal of the program is to give students an opportunity to learn problem-solving skills in the real world, without the help of a teacher or parent. She has seen a growing trend toward community service over the last few years. She commented, “Many students come to me or Mr. Croke looking for an internship in which they can give back to the community.” Some students who are interested in a career in healthcare may pursue an internship at a local hospital, while others may choose something completely “out of the box”. Ms. Stahl added, “The most important thing they learn is to advocate for themselves, and to get a taste of life outside the classroom, before they enter college.”

Senior Gillian Horowitz, with the help of her guidance counselor Anne Kaplan, decided to volunteer at the Bedford Hills Correctional Facility. As a freshman in high school, Gillian was involved in Club Interact, which gave her the opportunity to visit prisons in our area. She is involved in the Parenting Center, which also includes the Children’s Center and the Infant’s

Center. While many of her friends thought that working at a maximum security women's prison would be "really scary", Gillian has experienced just the opposite. She said, "These women are some of the most competent and sincerely interesting women I've interacted with recently. Of course, I know they're obviously here for a reason, but I get to know them as people on a very different level." The Parenting Center is a very unique program at the Bedford Hills Correctional Facility. Mothers who have infants under the age of one are allowed to have their babies live with them, while in prison. Classes in parenting and other important life skills are taught there, and mothers can spend important bonding time with their babies. Gillian has done everything from taking care of babies in the Infant's Center to talking to inmates who are waiting for visiting family members. Perhaps the biggest surprise for Gillian has been the way she views women at the prison. She doesn't relate to them as inmates, but rather, as women in an incredibly difficult situation, trying to learn how to eventually make it in the real world again. Gillian feels that one of the most important things she's learning is how the family relationship is maintained in prison. She commented, "I often sit in on visits with family members in the Children's Center, and I love to listen to how they interact with each other." Gillian also knows the internship will prove to be one of the most rewarding and enjoyable experiences she's ever had.

Many parents of seniors also love the Senior Internship Program because they appreciate watching their kids make the gradual transition into adulthood. They enjoy watching them get up every day, get to their jobs on time, and come home exhausted. Some parents even experience the thrill of seeing their children dressed in business suits, every workday. The Internship Program ends the week before graduation. While many seniors look forward to this very important day in their lives, many will also reminisce about their last six weeks of life in the work world.