

## Opening Doors

This year Angelica started partnering with Jennilie Brewster on a program she developed called Open Doors. Jennilie is a writer and artist who lives on Roosevelt Island and started volunteering at Coler Hospital several years ago. There she met a group of young men with spinal cord injuries from gunshot wounds who live in virtual isolation, without access to education or vocational training. Open Doors was started to connect these men with outside resources and opportunities to improve their lives.

The cornerstone of the program is a writing workshop designed to engage these men by encouraging them to discuss their experiences, and to read books and articles pertaining to their lives. One workshop participant wrote, "Growing up I didn't have a lot of support or guidance, so I chose to sell drugs and run the streets. Seeing all the fancy cars, jewelry, clothes and money is what lured me in. I never imagined I would end up in a wheelchair." While another revealed, "In my neighborhood, people don't fight with their hands. You've got 13-year-old kids running around with guns. They don't care about going to jail. They don't care about living."

In addition, the program provides one-on-one advocacy coaching devised to meet each participant at his point of need and gives modest individual grants to cover the costs of school supplies, laptops, outside courses and transportation. Moving forward it also aims to develop:

- An outside speakers program which will bring guest artists to Coler who are uniquely able to relate and inspire Open Doors participants.
- An internal speakers workshop designed to help each participant fully articulate his voice and story in order to educate community members, such as young people, on the consequences of gun violence.



**Jennilie working with one of the Open Doors participants, who is now attending LaGuardia Community College**



## 2016 Highlights

- ♥ Purchased supplies for the Coler art studio, paid for weekly art instruction and sponsored the Art Show
- ♥ Sponsored the annual Sweetheart Ball, Carnival Celebration and Harvest Ball
- ♥ Sponsored Healing Beauty Days and regular Reiki visits
- ♥ Sponsored monthly birthday parties and provided funding for some of the hospitals' holiday programs
- ♥ Partnered with New York Cares to host a weekly Thursday "Variety Night" program and a monthly "Sunday Social"
- ♥ Paid for monthly WiFi 'hot spot' service for tablets and laptop computers
- ♥ Sponsored programming on the AIDS and dementia units, including a cooking program and sensory stimulation materials
- ♥ Purchased a large fish tank for a dementia unit
- ♥ Provided funding for snack food like hot dogs, fruit for smoothies and popcorn for the movies



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