

SFC Diggs-A Mentor for Today's Youth

By Jessica Walter-Groft, DDC Command Affairs

Sergeant First Class (SFC) Deneen Diggs, USA, of the Defense Distribution Center's (DDC) Military Personnel Office, impacts the lives of local youth by volunteering for the YMCA's Young Black Achievers Program.

Meeting twice each month for three hours, the Young Black Achievers Program teaches life and career skills to students in seventh through twelfth grades.

SFC Diggs works with the tenth graders in the program, one of the most challenging groups. "Tenth graders are very competitive and peer pressure is at its highest, so it can be very difficult to get the students to focus."

But SFC Diggs has a unique advantage for controlling the class because one of her 25 students knows her very well. "My son is in my class, and he knows when I'm getting annoyed, and he will warn the other students that they need to calm down and concentrate."

Some of the life skills SFC Diggs teaches the students include listening effectively and dealing with change. "When we've got a lot on our plates, and something new is introduced into our lives, we've got to remember to take it one step at a time instead of becoming frustrated." To demonstrate this concept, SFC Diggs gave two students button down shirts and instructed them to simply button and unbutton the shirts. Easy enough. Then, she gave them a balloon with the instructions to keep the balloon in the air while buttoning and unbuttoning the shirts. And if the balloon fell to the floor? Start over again.

"This lesson gave them confidence, showing them that they could succeed. Even though it was challenging and they became frustrated, they were able to see it through," said SFC Diggs.

After the life skills lessons with SFC Diggs, the students break into their career clusters where they learn more about the areas of work that interest them like communications, business, law, construction, performing arts, health, and culinary arts. "Professionals from around the area volunteer their time to come in and introduce these kids to their profession to see if it really is something they are interested in pursuing," explained SFC Diggs.

Although SFC Diggs does not teach one of the career clusters, she sometimes moonlights, introducing the military as a possible career goal.

The Young Black Achievers Program also holds college tours and financial aid workshops for high school seniors.

Because of these initiatives, about 80 percent of the students in the program go to college.

SFC Diggs hopes to one day develop a girls club as part of the program. "I see the need for young ladies to have an influence that helps to raise their self esteem and build their morals."

Taking her role very seriously, SFC Diggs realizes how important her influence can be on these young lives that some consider at risk. "Sometimes parents just don't have enough time to spend with their kids, and even if they do, there are just some things that kids are more comfortable talking about with someone else."

She's not trying to save the world. Impacting just one of the students is worth all her time and effort. "Just think of what you can do if you can help one kid-just one kid."



Before the balloon: SFC Diggs (center) instructs Jaysha Hunter (left) and Brianna Diggs (right) to button and unbutton a white shirt. Later, SFC Diggs gave each student a balloon and asked them to keep it in the air while buttoning the shirt-an exercise that improved the students' confidence and ability to deal with frustration and change.