



## **Congratulations Class 11 Graduates!!**



**On February 05, 2016, LEAP proudly graduated Class 11**

**Anchelin Gonzalez was just 17 when she left the Bronx and moved to Palm Beach to give birth to her son back in 2005. She was "leading a fast and dangerous life" in New York, she says, but relocated to live with her uncle in a sunnier side of the country. It didn't change anything - six months later, Gonzalez was arrested for trying to rob a store with a firearm. She was sentenced to 11 years in the Homestead Correctional Institution.**

**But Gonzalez didn't spend those 11 years stewing. Last month, she was one of ten beaming graduates in matching caps and gowns who marched to "Pomp and Circumstance". With only five months left before she can reunite with her now 11-year-old son, Gonzalez is exiting Homestead Correctional with a certificate of graduation from LEAP.**

**"You have to believe you can change," says Gonzalez, who dreams of eventually opening a Puerto Rican food truck called "Boricua Flavor." "If you don't have that, what do you have?"**

**"I've been able to really learn about myself through LEAP," Gonzalez says.**

Rebecca Brown, who was a victim and aggressor of domestic violence, created a business plan to raise awareness about domestic violence. "Trac\_Z" will sell wristbands that link to an online resource of support for domestic violence victims. One dollar from each band will go toward battered women's organizations. It's a business model that is "very dear" to Brown's heart. Other business ideas range from a wellness center to a hotdog stand, each one imbued with the woman's passion, interests, and business savvy.

As graduates and guests prepared to mingle with loved ones and friends, guest speaker Tracy Mourning wisely advised, "Forgive yourselves. But don't look back, all you see are your tracks. Keep your nose clean," and most important, "Leave those no good men alone."



## **Mentor Spotlight: Angela Bailey**

At first glance, Angela Bailey is a statuesque goddess. She beams external radiance. A quick conversation with the former model, first time LEAP mentor, and entrepreneur quickly reveals that her radiance extracts from within.

First-time LEAP mentor Alexandra Martinez recently had the opportunity to speak with Bailey about her experience as a mentor and community leader. Here are excerpts from their conversation.

Q: Where are you from?

A: A rural town in Lakeland, Central Florida.

Q: What type of work do you do outside LEAP?

A: I run a nonprofit, [Urban Urban Reflections](#), where I provide mentoring services for at risk youth. I also have a for profit business, called [Walk This Way Productions](#) where we train aspiring models.

Q: How did you get into that business?

A: I used to be a professional model in New York City and Atlanta between 1996-2000. I am from a small town. Modeling was not a dream, as a young black woman growing up in the inner city people are not encouraging you to be a model. I was recruited in while I was at FAMU in Tallahassee, but my mother told me I couldn't pursue it until I obtained my degree. So I waited, got a masters in poly sci and went to New York right after graduation.

Q: What did you learn from that experience?

I saw too many young people losing themselves, selling souls, who didn't have confidence or the structure needed to pursue the career. It's a very harsh, very adult business. I've always known that I needed to be in the education realm, I needed to work with young people. So I created this organization to help young people who are navigating the industry. It's worse now, young girls are doing everything to be beautiful.

Q: What goals do you have for your students?

A: I want them to be successful women, I want to build self sufficient women who value their worth. Get their diplomas, graduate, get gainful employment, do what they want to do. We're getting mixed messages, young people are exposed to so much, they're confused. I want to be the advocate and say, "listen you don't need the boobs at 16." So we build them from the inside out, the principle applies in both organizations, they're all suffering from the same thing

Q: What type of work are you doing with LEAP?

A: With LEAP, I'm providing the same services I do with my two other organizations. Character development, business development, only here, I'm encouraging them to become entrepreneurs. I can share my experiences, since I've been one for 17 years. I want to help them with their journey and be an emotional support.

Q: How is it mentoring an adult compared to young people?

A: I love it. I was a little nervous at first. I have mentored adults before but never inside a prison setting. But after meeting the young women, I look forward to going in every month. Its hard to explain, its bigger than what I expected.

There are differences, you don't have to work hard on selling someone older and incarcerated on things that can happen. They know all too well.

Young people say "it won't happen to me." It's a really challenging thing, especially in Miami. It's a fast, fast city, and there are so many destructive things to get involved in.

Q: Who is your mentee?

A: Karen Graves, she wants to start a business for amputees called oneshoe.com. We have a lot in common, our energies and spirits, we have a lot of similar interests. I love her idea, you don't think about these things.

Q: Who has been one of your guiding mentors?

A: I only have one and she was not an official mentor, she didn't know she was my mentor until later on. She was my 5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher at Rochelle Elementary in Lakeland: Ms. Bailey. She was tough. I had behavior issues when I was younger and she reminded me often that I could change my life. She pushed me to think differently, outside the box. She didn't realize the words were sticking with me.

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## From the Executive Director

*Mahlia Lindquist*

**"It takes a village to raise a child" is an oft quoted proverb. The same idea applies to helping women successfully transition from prison to community. The majority of incarcerated women go in with a history of domestic violence, sexual abuse, and/or mental illness. When released they leave with the stigma of a criminal record, and usually without money, job, prospects or family support. Not one person or agency is equipped to deal with such a wide array of problems.**

**However, the experience of a recent LEAP graduate, Ms. Sanderson, illustrates how with the help of a village, transformation is possible. As a LEAP participant Ms. Sanderson received entrepreneurial training from Barry University professor Dr. Sandler.**



LEAP's main teacher and over a dozen community volunteer teachers offered classes on substance abuse, financial literacy, mindfulness, nutrition, anger & stress management, employability & interview skills, public speaking, resumes, business etiquette, and cognitive behavioral management over eight months. Ms. Sanderson's LEAP mentor, Vala Kodish, connected her with Johnny Leiberbaum, owner of Swago Custom Apparel, who took a chance and hired her for a position where she is acquiring skills related to the business she dreams of starting one day. When LEAP's case worker was unable to find Ms. Sanderson housing near her job, LEAP's board members called on their contacts in the community to get her placed at the Broward Outreach Center, which is close by and provides supportive transitional housing. Vala also took her thrifting and recruited friends to donate a bike and \$100 for a thrift shopping spree. Then there are the donors who keep LEAP going.

I had the pleasure of visiting with Ms. Sanderson this past weekend. She loves her job, has reconnected with her kids, raves about the folks at the Broward Outreach Center, can't wait to help other LEAPers and is brimming with joy and optimism. The woman seriously has it going on, and I have absolutely no doubt she will be completely self sufficient within a year. Between LEAP volunteers, mentors, donors, Barry University, the Broward Outreach Center and her employer, literally dozens of people were involved in providing Ms. Sanderson with a fresh start. Without them she would be homeless, unemployed, and at high risk of becoming one of the many repeat offenders.

It's not a lot of work from one person, but a little help from many people that makes all the difference. So, to the volunteers, board members, donors, teachers, case workers, community agencies and employers who comprise the LEAP village, thank-you - you are helping more than you know.

Just ask Ms. Sanderson.

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