



PRIDE helps disabled get an equal education

Brian Mickelson

When discussing the education of children with cognitive and mental disabilities, one significant problem inevitably arises — how do you ensure that they receive the same learning opportunities as non-disabled children, especially in public school systems?

According to Charlotte “Dee” Spinkston, founder and executive director of Urban Partnership Resources and Information on Disability and Education (Urban PRIDE), one of the problems is identifying that a child actually has a disability.

“Disability is really an invisible issue, particularly in communities of color,” she said. “Unless there’s a visible disability — like a kid in a wheelchair, or children who are blind or deaf — it’s very hard to identify someone with a disability. For the purposes of special education, things that are invisible can still be disabilities, whether they’re neurological or emotional or behavioral.”

Spinkston founded the nonprofit Urban PRIDE in 2000 around the time that her brother, who is disabled, was working with their mother trying to

obtain services. Experiencing their difficult search firsthand made her realize that families of disabled children needed an organization where they could go to for essential information, services and support.

Funded partially by an incubator grant from The Boston Foundation, Urban PRIDE serves individuals from childhood up to the age of 26, many of whom live in Roxbury, Dorchester and Mattapan. The group is dedicated to improving the availability of and access to culturally responsive support.

“We provide information through our newsletter and Web site, but the vast majority of the information we provide is actually one-on-one with families,” Spinkston said. “We spend a lot of time with families — reviewing materials, writing letters for them and providing training in various locations around the community on specific areas related to the law, whether its about inclusion, technology or understanding one’s rights under the law.”

Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education (IDEA) Act, disabled children are guaranteed “a free, appropriate public education” within

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Virginia Tech professor and poet Nikki Giovanni acknowledges the crowd's applause as she recalls the recent university shooting while speaking to an assembly at Bradley University Wednesday, April 18, in Peoria, Ill. Seung-Hui Cho, the student

Giovanni had expelled from her creative writing class two years earlier, killed 32 people and then himself during the April 16 massacre, the deadliest of its kind in United States history. (AP photo/Peoria Journal Star, Ron Johnson)

Professor had Va. Tech gunman removed from class

Allen G. Breed

BLACKSBURG, Va. — The mood in the basketball arena was defeated, funereal. Nikki Giovanni seemed an unlikely source of strength for a Virginia Tech campus reeling from the depravity of one of its own.

Tiny, almost elfin, her delivery blunted by the loss of a lung, Giovanni brought the crowd at the memorial service to its feet and whipped the mourners into an almost evangelical fervor with the words: “We are the Hokies. We will prevail, we will prevail. We are Virginia Tech.”

Giovanni had stood up to Seung-Hui Cho nearly two years before he drenched the campus in blood. Her comments last Tuesday showed that the man who had killed 32 students and teachers had not killed the school’s spirit.

“We are strong and brave and innocent and unafraid,” the 63-year-old

poet with the close-cropped, platinum hair told the grieving crowd. “We are better than we think, not quite what we want to be. We are alive to the imagination and the possibility we will continue to invent the future through our blood and tears, through all this sadness.”

He wore sunglasses to class and pulled his maroon knit cap down low over his forehead. When she tried to get him to participate in class discussion, his answer was silence.

“Sometimes, students try to intimidate you,” Giovanni told The Associated Press in a telephone in-

“We are the Hokies. We will prevail, we will prevail. We are Virginia Tech.”

— Professor Nikki Giovanni

In September 2005, Cho was enrolled in Giovanni’s introduction to creative writing class. From the beginning, he began building a wall between himself and the rest of the class.

interview. “And I just assumed that he was trying to assert himself.”

But then female students began complaining about Cho.

About five weeks into the semester, Giovanni, continued to page 11

Memoir project gives a slice of Hub’s history

David Pomerantz

Imagine a sunny Saturday afternoon in Roxbury’s Franklin Park. A group of men are taking a break from a cricket game to drink tea while their wives and children watch them and eat lunch.

“Families spread blankets on the sweet-smelling grass as we children played our own games ... I remember eating rice and peas, coconut bread and chicken.”

One of the men playing cricket would have been the Jamaican-born

father of Keitha Hassell, a lifelong Roxbury resident who shared that memory and others with over 100 guests, including Mayor Thomas M. Menino, at the Copley Square branch of the Boston Public Library on Monday night.

The event was part of the Memoir Project, an effort to collect and tell the stories of Boston’s seniors.

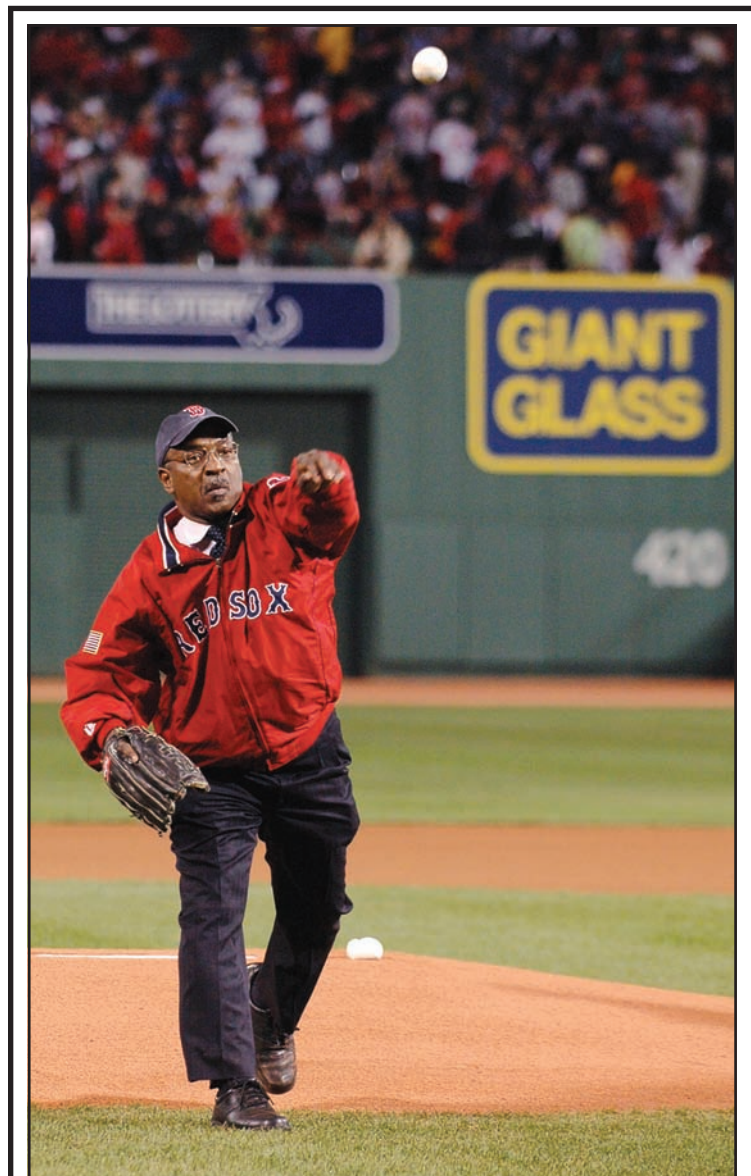
The project began a year ago as a collaboration between the city’s Commission on Affairs of the Elderly and Grub Street Inc., a nonprofit writing center based in Boston. The goal

was to create a forum for the city’s seniors to learn how to write their memoirs.

Aided by grant money from the Llewellyn Fund and the Calderwood Writing Initiative, the project travels from neighborhood to neighborhood in four-week workshops, bringing seniors in for free instruction from writing coaches on how to record their lives.

So far, the project has hit South Boston, the North End and Roxbury, and is now wrapping up a session in Chinatown that is being conducted in both English and Chinese. A book of the memoirs from these first four neighborhood workshops will be published this fall, according to Eliza Greenberg, commissioner of

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Noted civil rights attorney and Harvard Law School Professor Charles J. Ogletree Jr. throws out the first pitch as part of the Boston Red Sox’ commemoration of Jackie Robinson on Sunday, April 22. The Red Sox belted four solo home runs in a row in the third inning of a thrilling come from behind victory over the AL East rival New York Yankees. (Photo courtesy of Cindy Loo/Boston Red Sox)

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