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Article published Jan 28, 2008

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## YOU Inc. to mentor teens

By Brian Lee TELEGRAM & GAZETTE STAFF

**DUDLEY**— Three Nichols College graduates have taken on the task of helping Southbridge High School students find out what they want to become. Kristin L. Mayotte, Gaelyn Hastings and Lisa L. Bertolino are employees of Youth Opportunities Upheld Inc., a regional family counseling service based in Worcester.

The trio made Nichols the venue for Southbridge Upward Bound, a new four-year program that has recruited 53 high school freshmen and sophomores.

In May, the U.S. Department of Education awarded YOU Inc. \$1 million to run the program for four years. It's aimed at helping low-income, academically underprepared students get ready for college. The counselors completed their third week of activities Saturday at Davis Hall.

Ms. Mayotte, who runs all YOU Inc. education programs, said "there was no other option for us" when forming the partnership. "Southbridge was a neighboring community, we had the connection with Nichols and we had the experience there," said the Webster native and 1993 Nichols graduate.

Donald Altiery, who has worked at restaurants in Sturbridge, said he wants the program to help him nail job interviews. He strives to become a chef, a plan endorsed by fellow high school sophomore Scott M. Dowling, who said, "I eat Donnie's food."

The young men said they're looking for as much study help and enrichment as possible through YOU Inc.

"It will help us learn to be responsible and respectful and presentable and be better persons all-around," Mr. Dowling said.

Freshman Cristina B. Bsoumai said she likes the program's focus on community service, and will continue at Harrington Memorial Hospital in Southbridge.

About half of the recruited students participated in Saturday's icebreaker activity. They also prepared a student-driven mission statement, resolving to respect one another as they seek academic excellence.

The students will prepare for the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment Systems, midterms and study skills. A third of the Southbridge students in the program have not passed the eighth-grade MCAS tests.

Students are tutored Tuesday and Thursday afternoons at the high school. It's mandatory for those averaging a 75 or lower in English, math, foreign language or science. Writing workshops are also required.

Other assistance includes college entrance exam preparation, personal counseling, visiting college campuses and family activities.

Ms. Mayotte said students came to the program earlier this month "wanting to learn and wanting tutoring support. It's evident we're really matching a need for the community. Southbridge High School has been incredible about coordinating efforts with us."

Ms. Mayotte also heads education YOU Inc.'s day schools for children with emotional behavior issues and

for high school dropouts in Gardner, Uxbridge, Webster, Worcester and Southbridge.

A social services major who attained a master's in special education at Assumption College, Worcester, Ms. Mayotte said holding such a high level of responsibility at age 37 came about because of the business classes, which help with budgeting, marketing and managing about 65 staff members.

Ms. Bertolino, a program counselor, started working at YOU Inc. in November. She graduated from Nichols in 2004, majoring in sports management. She has worked with autistic children and wants to focus on special education. She is in her second year as Nichols' assistant field hockey coach.

Ms. Hastings, the organization's Upward Bound director, took a summer job at YOU Inc. in 1998, soon after graduating from Nichols with a business management degree.

It was an empowering experience that prompted her to return to YOU Inc. a year later. She's since finished her master's degree coursework in special education at Fitchburg State College.

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