

BRONX *Times*

REPORTER INC.

A growing mentoring program has found a new location for its offices, but its strong impact on the youth of the borough will remain the same.

As part of the American Latin Association of New York, Inc., the Bronx One on One Mentoring Program, or BOOM, is continuing to keep their focus strong after relocating its main office from the Family Life Academy Charter School on 14 W. 140th Street, to its own private location at 20 W. 190th Street.

BOOM president and CEO Israel Rodriguez started the program in 2005 after he made his idea of providing guidance and direction to teenagers into a reality.

Today, BOOM is dedicated to making a difference in the life of anyone between the ages of eight and 16 by providing role model mentors who can serve as positive influences in their lives. These volunteer mentors spend one on one time with a young person with hopes of meeting their individual needs and making an impact on them.

BOOM focuses on children whose parents are currently serving jail time, parents who have been deported or are in the process of being deported, children who are in foster care, and children and adolescents who need a positive influence during or after school time.

"It certainly was a challenge and it took quite a bit of time to really get things going," Israel Rodriguez said. "Getting the word out about what we do for children was the tough part, but now that we have been around for some time, the program honestly grows larger every year."

In late February, BOOM was able to open their private and larger location on W. 190th Street and use the new offices as a meeting place for its 88 mentors who once a month gather at the location to discuss their relationships and experiences with the 110 children who are enrolled in the program.

The children are entered into the program with one year mentoring contracts, but they can be renewed if they have developed strong relationships with their mentors or feel that they should continue with the guidance of the program.

"We have a great relationship with all of our mentors, and many of them go above and beyond in developing relationships with the children," said Johanna Alcantara, BOOM program director. "It really has a tremendous impact on the children and we have parents and guardians call in all the time saying it has had a huge impact academically and socially."

Mentors are selected based on a clean background and must have a strong desire to have an influence on a young person's life. Wayne Baker, owner of Frank Bee's Store on 3435 E. Tremont Avenue, has been a mentor for the last six months and it has been an amazing experience for him.

"It's a job that, as a mentor, you never feel that you can do enough," Baker said. "I feel that as mentors we serve as a safety net for these children to rely on. The main thing is that we are always available for the kids when they need us."

Although there are 88 mentors working for BOOM, they always have their doors open to any new volunteers who would like to make a difference.