

## **IECA Insights Article**

Last spring, Cammie Bertram was contacted by a member of the board of trustees of the Cape Eleuthera Foundation, a foundation that supports three initiatives on the Island of Eleuthera in the Bahamas. The foundation was seeking pro-bono assistance with boarding school placement for a small group of island students attending the Deep Creek Middle School (DCMS), one of the Foundation's benefactors. As Cammie was aware, I have had a special relationship with the island and its people for the past 20 years. When Cammie suggested I get involved, I jumped at the opportunity. As a former admission director, I found many accessible avenues to support underprivileged youth. Now as a consultant, I wished to continue this important work.

The Cape Eleuthera Foundation has established three major initiatives: The Island School, the Cape Eleuthera Institute and the Deep Creek Middle School. The Island School offers semester programs for high school age students with a particular focus on the local culture, marine ecology and sustainability. The Cape Eleuthera Institute was born out of the growing need to expand both research and sustainable systems initiatives operating under the auspices of The Island School. DCMS was founded by the Cape Eleuthera Foundation in September 2001, growing out of The Island School's Community Outreach Program. Fully endorsed and recognized by the Bahamian Ministry of Education, the school currently has 40 enrolled Bahamian students in grades seven through nine. The faculty are from the U.S. and Canada and follow an American independent school model, curriculum and pedagogy. ([www.islandschool.org](http://www.islandschool.org)).

Each year, a handful of students at DCMS are recognized as being interested and able to consider applying to and attending a boarding school in the United States. School founder, Jennifer Freeman, and current principal, Jennifer Bateman, have worked hard to place these unique students. In the past three years, seven students have been attending boarding schools in the United States and have been awarded financial aid to support their experience. DCMS students are currently represented at Episcopal High School, Kimball Union Academy, Lawrence Academy, Proctor Academy and Vermont Academy. All of the students at these schools have proven to be academically successful and several have developed into leaders in the dorms and community at large.

After a disappointing 2007 admission season, Jennifer Bateman and members of the board decided to seek counsel from an educational consultant. I was thrilled to volunteer my services and advice. This past winter, Jennifer Bateman and I attended the TABs conference in Boston where we were able to identify a number of schools that would be interested in this special population of students. We were delighted by the support from our admission colleagues and their willingness to work with us. In January, Jennifer brought four students to the states to tour and interview at 16 schools: Berkshire School, Cheshire Academy, Cushing Academy, Emma Willard School, The Gunnery, Lawrence Academy, The Lawrenceville School, New Hampton School, Northfield Mount Hermon School, Peddie School, The Putney School, South Kent School, Suffield Academy, The Taft School, Trinity-Pawling School and the Williston Northampton School. The tour was remarkably successful, and the students returned to DCMS charged about completing their applications.

On March 10, we received good news. Three of the four students had been admitted to at least one school and offered a full financial aid package, and the fourth student has been admitted but waitlisted for financial aid at two schools. In the fall, Alexander Cates will be matriculating at Lawrence Academy, Travis Clarke at Trinity-Pawling School, and Chanel Williams at The Lawrenceville School. We still hold out hope that Denzel Seymour will have an option before the fall.

At the end of March, I was able to visit both the Deep Creek Middle School and The Island School. Neither of these programs can be truly realized without seeing them first hand. I was overwhelmed by the commitment and dedication of the faculty at DCMS. The school is made up of a combination of several converted apartment rooms, but the walls were filled with books, art projects and writing samples. The students are clearly connected to their teachers, and both are enthusiastic and proud of their school. The evident hard work from the teachers and students presents a contrast to the laid back tropical setting.

My visit and tour of the Island School gave me a similar impression. Although the facilities were a contrast to DCMS, the industrious culture of the campus was palpable. I had always had an appreciation of the academic challenge of The Island School, but I had no idea of the physical challenge that the students were presented with. At the commencement of the semester, each student is required to either run a half marathon or swim two miles in the ocean. I was also particularly impressed with the environmental initiatives, for example the bio-fuel that powers all of the school vehicles. The faculty, students, curriculum, research and location are all extremely impressive at The Island School. A semester in that program is no vacation...

Although this work with Deep Creek Middle School has been both challenging and time consuming, the rewards are countless. My involvement with the DCMS is the perfect intersection of my professional and personal interests. I am proud to be a part of it and help to give back to an island and people that have been a special part of my life for many years.