

Amy Shimshon-Santo Wants You to Invest in Futures



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Famed workplace behavior guru Abraham Maslow said, “What is necessary to change a person is to change his awareness of himself.” Through the work of the WTS-LA Adopt-A-School Committee, CREO principal and Adopt-A-School chair Dr. Amy Shimshon-Santo and WTS members are changing the way students view themselves.

“One of the things that really excited me was seeing student scholarship recipients from last year,” explains Shimshon-Santo. “We invited them back to participate in our outreach activities for this year’s scholarship events. And every single one of them wanted to participate. Every single one of them had also gotten into college. And every single one of them wanted to talk to 11th graders and encourage them to apply to college. That made me realize how these activities motivate young people. It helps the students realize that there are people and a professional world out there that want them to succeed. And it was thrilling to see that.”



“You could see the girls hold themselves as leaders. In one year, you watch them go from thinking, ‘Can I even go to college?’ to ‘I am in college and I want to be an aerospace engineer or an environmental engineer.’ In one year we watched them cross that border between the thought of just finishing high school into the idea of finishing college and launching a career. And I’m proud to say that WTS-LA was part of that.”

Shimshon-Santo cites WTS-LA’s involvement with a wide range of students—from high school freshman to graduate students—as a key differentiator. She also believes that the participation of working professionals in transportation helps inspire those students, as they work directly with living role models. And there is another structural element of the program that promotes success.

“In general, we work with specific schools or through an intermediary like International Trade Education Programs (ITEP) or Los Angeles Education Partnerships (LAEP). This summer we’re working with ITEP to provide a workshop for their summer internship program. Then we’re going to be a part of a careers

conference in the fall. We'll go out to all of our participating schools to connect with students and counselors about scholarships and careers."

Recently, Shimshon-Santo and the committee hosted a college and career panel for 11th graders from Susan Miller Dorsey High School. The event was facilitated by Akeba Jackson (the Susan Miller Dorsey High School Law, Public Service, STEM Coordinator) and featured Annel Castro, a UC Santa Barbara student, former WTS-LA scholarship recipient, and Susan Miller Dorsey High School alumna. The panel lineup was stellar, and included LADOT project manager Tina Backstrom, PE; LAWA senior engineer Rosa Brice, PCE; transportation systems and experience designer Akash Chudasama; Masuda Consulting principal and former Santa Monica Transportation Demand Programs manager Judi Masuda; and PMCM Consulting Engineers principal Reggie Wright, PMP. By all accounts the panel was informative, moving, and inspiring. But Shimshon-Santo was primed for the panel through a previous experience.

"Before the panel, Dr. Fahamisha Butler invited me to lead a women's studies class at Dorsey High. We focused on how transportation impacted girls and women. And the girls came up with all of these fantastic ideas on how to make transportation better and safer for girls and women in Los Angeles. They had all experienced fear on public transportation just going to and from school. So we were able to make them realize that, as users, they were actually experts on the subject. So I feel very hopeful about involving girls in this process, as they become more aware of transportation as a discipline and a career. They've grown up on public transportation. They have a unique, interesting, and important perspective on it and their contribution to the industry will be extremely valuable."

Shimshon-Santo is passionate about her work. And that passion is infectious. But it's also well founded. And she believes that anyone who participates in the Adopt-A-School program and sees the intelligence, determination, and promise of these young women will feel the same fervor.

"We're investing in girls. And the girls we've worked with before return and show leadership for the next generation. That's very rewarding. So this is really a profound opportunity for WTS-LA members to get involved and volunteer. It will change your life while changing theirs."

Abraham Maslow said, "What is necessary to change a person is to change his awareness of himself." Dr. Amy Shimshon-Santo and the Adopt-A-School committee are changing the way students view themselves. And they want your help to do more. Join the Adopt-A-School committee and volunteer your time for the young transportation women of tomorrow. Contact Dr. Amy Shimshon-Santo to find out how you can help.