

## PROFILES

### Bill Gary

# Knowing How It Is Helps!

"Black people are beginning to focus in on the problem," said Bill Gary explaining why black youth in colleges are now returning to their communities to encourage more and more young people to stay in school and go on to higher education.

The idea of the College Outreach Program originated in the very fertile mind of Bill Gary following a college night program at the Neighborhood House several years ago.

Bill and others had arranged to have young students from various colleges come to the center that evening to share their experiences with the Plainfield high school students.

"I got to thinking that one night was not enough," Bill said. "I could see that we needed something like this for the students on a year round basis."

Bill understood that he would have to maintain a high level of interest in order to keep the students coming to the meetings throughout the year.

"We decided that we would have to offer interesting programs. Also we wanted to acquaint the students with the whole range of college experience, so we had people come in to talk with them about the S.A.T. scheduling, we worked with them on completing applications and following through on applications for financial aid."

In order to help the students sense the reality of college, Bill began to arrange trips to various schools, enabling the students to see the environment, sense the atmosphere and participate in some of the activities.

"They were then able to see that this was something into which they could project them-

selves, something with which they could identify," Bill explained.

Bill came to Plainfield from Greenville, South Carolina when he was about seven years old. His father died when he was eleven, leaving his mother, his sister and himself. Bill went through the Plainfield school system.

"I more or less had to make it on my own," said Bill in answer to a query as to encouragement he received from high school personnel to go on to school. "Nobody was pushing me toward college," Bill recalled, "but I was kind of lucky that I wasn't good with mechanics or I probably would have taken that way out."

As it was Bill took a business course and a few college preparatory subjects. He "sort of stumbled into college."

"I had a couple of friends who had gone to college and I identified with them. Then I had a cousin who had gone to school. He talked to me and I began to think that if they could do it, so could I."

Laughing, Bill recalled that another thing that helped him decide to get into school was all that heavy work he was pulling down in a factory that first semester that he didn't go to school.

When Bill completed his studies at Central State in Wilberforce, Ohio he returned to Plainfield. He worked with the Parole Board for a while, then with the Neighborhood House in Plainfield. At present, he works as a social worker with the Plainfield School system. His work, however, with the students in the College Outreach Program is

a voluntary contribution that he is making to the community.

"Last year we sent thirty kids to college," he said. "This year we've gotten twenty-eight in. You know we almost had a hundred per cent this year - out of thirty-three seniors, we put twenty-eight in. I was mad about missing out on the other five, but ...)

What are the high school students, with which Bill works, like?

"The kids are pretty deep. They are really thinking out things before they act. Once they get something that they can really rally behind I think it will be a very beautiful thing."

In general, are the youngsters interested enough in Plainfield to come back to it?

"They're really beautiful," says Bill. "Most of them say that they want to come back to this community to work. They want movement and change and I believe they will accomplish social, political and educational change."

Students who have gone on to school through the Outreach Program return to talk to those still in the program to encourage them and share what they are learning about the college scene.

"One girl was really beautiful," Bill said. "She went to C.A.P. to get a job and told them even if there weren't any paying positions available, she still wanted to come down and rap with the kids."

In a few years, Bill says, Plainfield will have a number of young black leaders out of this growing group of young black youth who go on to school but do not lose sight of the problems faced by their people in

Plainfield.

"Their minds are well cultivated, they have black awareness. When they come back they will have something significant to contribute.

"Many of them say that they want to come back here to teach in our schools," Bill said. "I don't think college will separate them from their concern for our people."

The Outreach Program holds raffles and a few other fund raising events to raise the money needed to operate. The funds are used to pay application fees, S.A.T. fees, finance college trips and financial assistance to the students.

The single largest contribution has been from Afro American for Action who have presented over \$4,000 to the group. Bill would like to see more organizations make scholarships available to the members of the College Outreach Program. Finance is usually the biggest hurdle faced by the students.

"A lot of people are dealing in rhetoric, not action," said Bill. "We need to be out there giving the youngsters confidence in themselves. I really would like to see the people get more involved. We have a lot of people screaming and hollering but they are not directly involved with the kids, they aren't directly involved with the political and educational change that we're trying to make for the cause. I think that's paramount. We as a people have to stop dealing with 'I'm blacker than thou' and start doing things - this is the key."

And so it is.