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## Events and Accomplishments

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### **Where Some See Risk, Group Leader Sees Opportunity**

On a tree-lined street in the residential neighborhood of Ozone Park, Queens stands SCO-128<sup>th</sup> Street, a Non-Secure Placement group home that currently houses four boys. In the foyer is a collection of artwork and school projects proudly on display. The youth's art continues around the house, some framed, some painted on the walls in common rooms. Upstairs are the youth's rooms: beds are neatly made, and possessions in order on top of the bureaus. Each boy has a goldfish in a small plastic bowl. They are responsible for feeding the fish and cleaning their bowls. If living conditions aren't up to snuff and the fish dies, it will not be replaced. Each boy is responsible for a living creature, explained Group Leader, Edwidge "Ed" Michel.

Ed is a man of lessons. He is devout and purposeful in his leadership. "You're on my chessboard" he'd say to the boys in a reminding tone- an expression they know well. Broadly, it indicates "rethink your decision" as you might in a game of chess. Ed wants the boys to be thinking a step ahead about the choices they make. He believes in them, and wants them to believe in themselves. He's brought them camping in New Jersey and sightseeing in Washington D.C. - pushing the boundaries of what is typical of a non-secure placement home. This is testament of the way he leads, the respect he commands, and the respect he gives. For many, these trips seemed like a liability, but for Ed they were an opportunity. He wants to broaden the boys' horizons; enrich them in culture and experiences they have never had the opportunity of experiencing.

"Many of these kids only know what I like to call the 'Bermuda Triangle': from their project building to the liquor store, to the Chinese restaurant down the block." He said.