

## EDUCATION

# Lake Oswego nonprofit helps students set their sights high

*Student Visions offers a mix of classes, counseling and public service designed to help young people excel*

By **SKIPP THOMSEN**  
THE OREGONIAN

Elena Hillier had a vision when she moved to Beaverton five years ago.

"I wanted to start something that could bring about change," said Hillier, 52. "I wanted to put all my experiences working with youth together and start something that could really help them."

Today, she is CEO of Student Visions, a nonprofit organization she founded a year and a half ago in



**HILLIER**

*Wants to build sense of self-worth*

families can sign up their children with Student Visions. An application and interview are required, and financial aid is available.

In return, families receive serv-

ices that include tutoring, mentoring, classes, SAT preparation, college application counseling, advice on applying for financial aid and internship placement. All the services combine to make applying to college easier and provide students with more individual attention than they could get from public school counselors, Hillier said.

For a membership fee of \$1,500 and a yearly fee of about \$100,

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Student Visions members are also required to participate in community service, either through Student Visions or outside groups.

Hillier, a native of New York City, worked there with state and city youth services agencies, helping youths volunteer and do job shadowing. She used that experience and her savings, along with donations of computers and office

supplies from local businesses, to create Student Visions.

So far, Student Visions has 37 members ranging from grade school to college. Many members of the office staff are interns from Portland Community College, Portland State University and the University of Portland.

Eli Joyner, a 17-year-old senior at Lakeridge High School in Lake Oswego, joined Student Visions about six months ago after his mother heard about the program through a friend. Joyner has since been tutored by a PCC student and has participated in several community service projects.

"I think (Student Visions) will help me in the future," Joyner said. "It has helped my attitude so far

and helped me realize what my potential is."

Joyner plans to attend the University of Oregon and study business or computers. He would like to return to Student Visions to mentor high school students after he enters college.

Hillier said the program's goal is to put students such as Joyner in situations where they can excel and learn more about themselves, rather than just concentrate on getting into the college of their choice.

"My original idea was to help kids be more balanced through family-oriented community service activities and shadowing older mentors to their jobs and classes," Hillier said. "That way they will

have more self-worth and respect for diversity instead of just bumbling around."

Hillier's plans for Student Visions include expanding the program to international students. In what Hillier has called a "United Nations of Students," children from different countries would meet in Oregon to discuss global issues from politics to the environment.

"Not being happy with the way adults take care of business today, I want to bring kids together to embrace the beauty of diversity," Hillier said. "These children could work on how to dialogue instead of using weapons. They are young and the future leaders of their countries."