

# Kids alike, whether in college or jail



**EILEEN  
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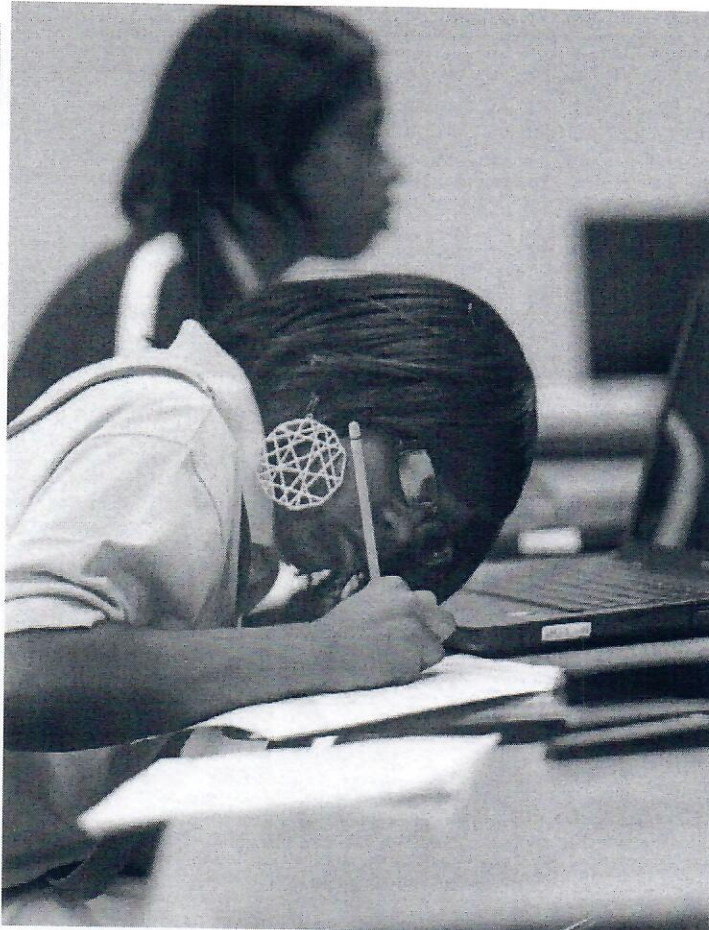
Eileen Arnold is a counselor at Dohn Community High School in Walnut Hills.

**T**he youth of inner-city Cincinnati live surrounded by a broken world – broken lives, broken families, broken schools and no way out.

The inner city is gray – literal and figurative gray walls lock in the very young who have no other guide but what they see in front of them. Heroic poor, single mothers lock their kids inside on summer days in an attempt to keep them safe from the influence of the streets. Otherwise, the young see a world that requires both males and females to “man up” in the only way offered – through violence.

Why is disrespect such an issue? Ask yourself : If you had nothing, what would you defend? What defines you as an individual? Your job? Your family? Your friends? Your success? Your home? Your neighborhood? What if you had none of these and lived in a world in which nothing and no one could be trusted? Why not just put bars around the inner city? There's no need. The invisible bars are already in place – no jobs, few intact families and no role models. Lock them all up? Others will fill those vacant spots quickly.

It is easy to point fingers and to become the censor, the judge. It is easy to believe we are different. I



Dohn Community High School counselor Eileen Arnold says inner-city kids become trapped in poverty and surrounded by violence. Shown are students at Dohn in 2013.

challenge anyone to live their lives – the lives of the inner-city youth – and behave differently.

Yes, there are always those stunning exceptions whom we rush in to save and provide avenues out. But, what about those no one wants to save? It is easy to believe they are not like us.

What's not easy? Working for change within the inner city. Rolling up your sleeves and attempting to understand these disenfranchised, these lost, these hopeless young people. They are our children, too. This is our city. This is our home.

The answer is not to lock up more and more frightened, hopeless, angry and lost young. Once you know them, you discover bright, sparkling, energetic, creative, kind and valuable people who are trapped and cornered.

I have worked in the suburbs, and I have worked in the inner city. I have worked with students who were accepted to the Ivy Leagues and I have worked with students who were sent to jail for murder. I can tell you – these teenagers are the same. What makes the difference? The advantages provided from birth.

It is not too late. Do something. Walk into our schools, our churches, our soup kitchens. Join those walking the streets for justice. Spend even 10 minutes of your time experiencing and knowing inner-city youths instead of judging them. Even a moment gifted to a young person can make a lasting difference – especially if we all commit to one moment.

This would be the beginning of a revolutionary change.