



## Rites of Passage Program - An Overview

The Rites of Passage Program (ROP) is the founding program of The Brotherhood Sister Sol. It is a group mentoring model designed to provide a safe space where youth can establish life-long bonds and engage in a curriculum that supports them in developing critical thinking, self-confidence and finding their true “voice”, while formulating their moral values, and developing a broad understanding of issues that are critical to their healthy development.

ROP is a space where we work with youth to define a moral and ethical code, to define what it means to be women and men, leaders, and sisters and brothers, to bond and find community and support – all while guided by talented and dedicated youth workers who serve as educators and guides – as family. It is a long-term program during which the cohort of youth remain together through graduation.

There are four phases to ROP:

- **Phase 1—Bonding & Community Building:** Developing a functioning Chapter is the most crucial of all ROP activities and serves as a foundation for all other aspects of the program. Weekly chapter meetings are led by “Chapter Leaders” (adult educators) who work in pairs and serve as mentors, teachers, confidants, role-models and friends. Chapter Leaders provide the critical, connective link between the students, their parents and the broader school community. Chapter Leaders work to create a confidential safe-space where students meet to discuss current issues that affect their lives, exchange information, and acquire knowledge. Together, the students in each Chapter choose a name for their group, develop a mission statement and arrive at a collective definition of “sister/brother”, “woman/man” and “leader”. These statements become the core values of the Chapter which each member must struggle to live by. Through this experience members develop deep friendships and begin to discover the powerful love and support that comes from true Sisterhood and Brotherhood. These chapters are established at schools so that our staff have an anchor in these schools and can support the academic development of our “members.”
- **Phase 2 -Critical Thinking, Global Awareness, Knowledge of Self:** The ultimate goal of Rites of Passage is to help youth develop into critical thinkers - youth who are intelligent, self-confident, able to analyze their environment, derive sensitive conclusions, and make educated, informed decisions. The development of these skills is essential if youth are to fully understand themselves and the world they have inherited. Our approach teaches them how to recognize and utilize available resources to achieve their full potential. Diverse reading materials, various forms of media and engaging activities are used to challenge the students to analyze their environment, sharpen their understanding of the world and develop creative solutions to personal and community problems. In this phase Chapter activities extend far beyond the classroom. Youth develop leadership skills and gain a deeper understanding of themselves and their surroundings through exploration and analysis of their extended community. Through participating in, and reflecting on service projects, conferences, community

events, and attending films, plays and other cultural and educational activities members expand their horizons and gain deeper understandings of themselves and their surroundings.

- Phase 3 –Oath of Dedication: Within the 3rd phase of ROP youth begin designing and facilitating their own sessions. They are required to engage in an intensive process of self-reflection and analysis. This results in the creation of an individual “Oath of Dedication” describing the core values that each young person will strive to live by - a personal testimony of their beliefs, goals and lifetime commitment. The Oath of Dedication Ceremony is a symbol of entering young adulthood. Members who complete the process take on a leadership role within the chapter.
- Phase 4 –Lifetime Commitment: In the final phase of the program students begin to “give-back” to their community by organizing their own service activities, often co-facilitating younger member’s chapter meetings and providing new members with support and guidance. As they are preparing to graduate and move on to college or the workforce, they are also “lifting as they climb”, serving as examples and role models for younger youth.

Over the course of the program members participate in weekly workshops, led by Chapter Leaders, there are 35 in total and they are based on our 12 Curricula Focus Issues: Mind, Body & Spirit; Leadership Development; Pan African & Latinx History; Dismantling Sexism and Misogyny; Sexual Education and Responsibility; Drugs & Substance Abuse; Conflict Resolution & Violence Prevention; Political Education; Educational Achievement; Economic Systems & Financial Literacy; LGBTQ+ Justice & Environmental Justice.

Through our Rites of Passage Program we support our members to achieve the following goals:

1. Develop personal values that include respect for themselves, their family and the larger community.
2. Gain a greater understanding of and appreciation for their cultural and historical legacy
3. Develop into critical thinkers who can analyze personal and societal issues and who are committed to self and community development.
4. Broaden their knowledge of social issues and increase their participation in community activities.
5. Find their creative voice.
6. Develop a powerful sense of self-worth and belief in their ability to achieve.
7. Improve their academic performance and develop a lifelong love of learning.
8. Increase their involvement in the workforce, internships and travel.
9. Learn the life skills essential for survival and success.
10. Create a personal testimony of their values, beliefs, and goals that reflects an understanding of their moral responsibility to others.
11. Refrain from addiction, avoid incarceration and avoid teenage pregnancy
12. Graduate from high school, attend college and/or gain long term and secure employment.

Our evidence-based programs contribute to outcomes that far surpass New York City statistics:

- Harlem's teenage pregnancy rate is 17% - our members have a rate of < 2%;
- In New York City, the general high school graduation rate is 70%, whereas 94% of BroSis alumni have graduated or earned their GED.
- In Harlem, 30% of youth, ages 18-25, are working full-time or in college; whereas 95% of BroSis youth are working full-time or enrolled in college.
- After nearly 30 years, no BroSis members or alumni are incarcerated and less than 1% are on probation.