

## Kingsborough Peer Educators Fight Crisis in the Crib

A small group of Kingsborough Community College (KCC) Health students have launched a campaign to make a big difference in the health of children before they are conceived.

In February, four students took the powerful messages they received in November as U.S. Office of Minority Health Preconception Health trainees to St. Francis College, in Brooklyn Heights, as trainers. Financially supported by the New York Chapter of March of Dimes, this two-day training had a clear message: if you take steps to become healthy *before* conceiving a child, your child's odds of living to celebrate his or her first birthday will increase dramatically.

The students, members of the KCC Community Health Club and advised by KCC Community Health co-director Dr. Karen Denard Goldman, conducted a Preconception Peer Educator

miscarriage, premature birth (birth before 37 weeks gestation) and infant mortality (death of an infant before the age of one year). Equally impor-



**KCC trainees pose with Tonya Lewis Lee (Mrs. Spike Lee), honorary chairperson of Crisis in the Crib, during training in November.**

tant, as pointed out by guest speaker Tonya Lewis Lee, was the disproportionately high rate of infant mortality in African American infants, which is 13.7 of every 1,000 children nationwide – more than double that of the general population (6.8 for every 1,000).

Over the course of two eight-hour days of education, St. Francis College and KCC students learned about a number of issues regarding the health

of both prospective parents before conception, the health of mother and child during pregnancy, and the infant's health before the age of one. Determinants of health – such as diet, drug use, vitamin use, dental hygiene, and diabetes, were discussed in detail. Among the topics covered regarding the

mortality rates between African Americans and the rest of the population centrally focused on the social determinants of health. In other words, the

health factors that are determined by location, income, and race. These factors often play a role in a person's access to healthcare.

Guided by Dr. Goldman, aided by Dr. Starr Eaddy of St.

Francis and Professor Joyce Hall of Hunter College, the peer educators shared a wealth of information and statistics

regarding the health of prospective parents. The peer educators employed a variety of interactive teaching methods, including a scavenger hunt, question-and-answer presentations, engaging small group discussions, and a Life-Course board game. The experiences of three guest speakers played a very powerful role in adding a real-life perspective to the training. Their stories greatly

reinforced students' devotion to their cause.

Capping off the first day of training was an informative group conversation with a doula named Joan Sherwood. Trainees learned about the role of a doula, which is to coach a mother through her pregnancy and birth. On the second day of training, the courageous stories of Amy Abbey and Danielle Buck, mothers who experienced miscarriage and death of an infant child, respectively, further cemented the reality of infant mortality into all those involved and inspired them to pay for the training they were receiving.

"The contributions of these women had a big effect on the students," said Xondra Garraway, Community Health Club vice president. "They helped us educators to personalize the reality of infant mortality."

A total of 11 students received certificates qualifying them as Peer Educators



**Brandon Moriarty teaches reproductive and anatomy physiology to Students.**

Training event to inspire and prepare other students to spread awareness of a lesser-known – yet critically important – health issue. The students are trainers Farrah Denis, Xondra Garraway, Brandon Moriarty, and Colleen Seymour.

Their main focus was to address the issues of mis-



**Instructors and advisors pose with first graduating class.**

in Preconception Health by the U.S. Office of Minority Health, which sponsors the national Preconception Peer Education Initiative. The newly trained peer educators will, in turn, use the knowledge they received to educate their own peers. Hopefully this program will be the start of an upward trend of infant survival and health in the years to come in Brooklyn.