Class Act

November 1, 1999 By Shana Naomi Krochmal

When Kathryn Kuebler was paired with Clifton, New Jersey, city councilwoman Gloria Kolodziej for a day of civic learning last spring, their small talk sparked big changes. The Jersey girl, 18, gave her elder a lesson in the AIDS-awareness club at her school. When Kolodziej asked how she could apply the students' work to the municipal level, Kuebler suggested free HIV testing and counseling services—and the city council took her up on it by implementing her ideas. "Kathryn actually helped *me* to learn a lot," said Kolodziej. We caught up with Kuebler after classes let out.

Why did you start the club?
Our school didn't do anything about AIDS. There's not even sex ed until senior year—but most kids are having sex by then. At first the school put restrictions on what we could say or write in pamphlets. They didn't want us to talk about homosexuals or mention anal and oral sex in our hand--outs. They let up because I kept pushing them.

How did you turn a tour of City Hall into HIV 101?
You're supposed to be quiet, but I have lots of opinions. All of the surrounding cities have testing, but not Clifton. I wanted something that wasn't limited to helping only students. Other people need help, too.

What's next for you?
I want to study forensic medicine—I'm being optimistic and hoping there won't be a need for AIDS research by the time I finish school.

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