

With high school graduations approaching, some students may not know what career they want to pursue. Others may not have the guidance they need to accomplish that goal and this is where Julian's Light comes in. Julian's Light is a non-for-profit recreation and education organization that assists students with staying focused in school through activities, programs and being their support system.

On May 1, Julian's Light held its first speaker series, "Career Sturdy and Under Thirty," for students between the ages of 13-18. The event featured a panel discussion with five speakers from a variety of professional fields and all under 30-years-old. The panelists were, Indira Jerez, founder of the Inertia Project, Goldin Martinez founder of Get Focused, leasha Ramsay a therapist and wardrobe stylist, Alex Rias co-founder of Step Above and Gael Black the Public Communications Manager at the New York Women's Foundation. Yampiero Polanco, a volunteer for Julian's Light, moderated the discussion. Each panelist spoke about their journey to success, challenges and even offered students advice on how to make their dreams a reality.



Julissa Rosado, President of Julian's Light and alumni from the University at Albany was inspired to start a speaker series because she attended similar events while in college. "When I was thinking about the youth that I deal with I thought of what would be a good thing that's similar to that but that they could relate to," Rosado told Urban Latino. "I created this idea of Career Sturdy and Under Thirty which has young professionals that have amazing accolades that could relate to the kids and then I started it."



The first panelist up was Alex Rias, co-founder of Step Above and Deputy Chief of Staff at New York City Council. Step Above was founded in 2011 and through the arts such as stepping, spoken word, and workshops they work with students so they can become leaders. Rias engaged the students throughout his discussion and spoke about growing up in Queens and his road to success. His advice for students? "Maintaining your hunger is not an easy thing," he said. "When you get one bite you have to train your body to get more of that."



Growing up in Washington Heights, daughter of a single mother and a “deadbeat dad” Indira Jerez never thought about the possibility of going to college. When she was accepted into Syracuse University she obtained internships, work study and a job. Right out of college she landed a job at Goldman Sachs. “During my tenure there, it was great [but] I was chasing the money, taking care of my mom and I did pretty good for myself,” she said. “But there was a moment in my life where I looked at what I was doing and who I was helping and I thought to myself, I need to go back to my roots [and] I need to go help people who I feel have a similar background to me.” From there Jerez quit her job and started working at Same Sky, a jewelry company that employs HIV positive women in Rwanda and Zambia. With 4 years under her belt, Jerez has even worked and traveled to Rwanda and Zambia. As the founder of Innertia Project she helps people with career transitions and being confident.

With careers and networking a big focus throughout the evening, Goldin Martinez began his presentation by handing out business cards with a raffle number on them. Martinez, a fitness model, personal trainer, motivational speaker and founder of the Get Focused Organization spoke on the importance of innovation. “You have to learn to use innovation towards your benefit,” said Martinez. “I don’t do raffle tickets, I combine networking with raffles.” Everyone’s face lit up, eager to learn more and find out what the prizes were. Before the prizes, Martinez shared his five tips to becoming successful: “Find your passion, identify a problem and find a solution, create your mission, develop a plan and lastly ask for help.”

leasha Ramsay had one unique story that was different from the rest. At just 16-years-old, Ramsay started her first year at the University at Albany. That was enough to get the students attention. She majored in psychology and social work and graduated at 20-years-old. “I learned how people work, about the government, [and] how to help people that are in trouble,” she explained. At 22-years-old she’s a therapist with a Master’s Degree. When she’s not in the office, Ramsay is on set styling celebrities and works on the marketing campaign for R&B artist Ryan Leslie. More recently, Ramsay started the organization, “You Can Sit With Us.” She mentors and introduces students into the fashion industry by giving them the opportunity to work with her on photo-shoots and attend workshops. As someone who wears many hats, Ramsay ended her address by urging students to try different things. “Put your hands in everything that you want to do, so you can learn what you don’t want to do,” she said.

Last but not least, Gael Black the Public Communications Manager at The New York Women's Foundation took the floor. A graduate from the University at Albany, Black majored in Political Science and History with a minor in Latin American and Caribbean Studies. One event that impacted her life was September 11, 2001. "It completely changed the way I looked at the world, the government, the limits of power and the world is really small place," she said. That event made her be more vocal and speak up and question what's around her.

In high school she started the Model United Nations team where she debated on international issues. After voicing her concerns during a faculty meeting she was advised to apply for the United Nations internship and was accepted. In college, Black ran two major conferences a year all while attending classes and even missed her graduation because of a conference. At The New York Women's Foundation she started the communications department and in 2012 was promoted to Public Communications Manager. Towards the end of her address, Black provided practical tips to succeed, "Speak up and question what's around you, read, write and listen," she said. "It will help you develop personally and professionally."

When the panelists wrapped up, they gladly met with students individually and networked. For Kayshla Ramos, a student at Adlai E. Stevenson High School, the advice she received from the panelists were extremely helpful especially Goldin Martinez five steps. "The five steps that Goldin Martinez gave made me think ahead of what I want to do in life," she said. "I'm going to take every piece of advice that everyone has given me today."

*For more information on Julian's Light and how you can donate to the organization, please visit [www.julianslight.org](http://www.julianslight.org)*

