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Misty Wilson The future as multicultural

By KAREN A. DAVIS
Journal Staff Writer

PROVIDENCE — Misty Wilson envisions a society in the not-too-distant future in which everyone lives in a multicultural neighborhood — not a neighborhood that's "predominantly this" or "predominantly that."

The 17-year-old high-school senior spent much of her childhood in a South Providence neighborhood that included blacks, Asians, Hispanics, and Native Americans. Looking back, says Misty, who is African-American, "I feel privileged to know other cultures."

Working toward her vision, the soft-spoken yet dynamic young woman has both joined and created public-service organizations to strengthen local communities.

"One of my most amazing accomplishments," she says, "is I'm a co-founder of Youth in Action," a leadership organization run by a diversity of young people. "One of the main reasons why I became involved in Youth in Action, and other things that I'm involved in, is because I feel a need to make my community a better place,

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The senior at the Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center, who cofounded Youth in Action, says: "I feel privileged to know other cultures."

Journal photo/
MARY BETH MEEHAN

Misty

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and help the young people of my generation . . . take an active role in helping to develop their communities — and their lives, too."

Misty attends the Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center — the Met School — and her goals include college. By contrast, she says, "too many" of the young people she knew in middle school have become pregnant, dropped out, joined gangs, even landed in the state Training School — or jail.

"That's pretty sad for me, because I have hope for people that are my age, and I want to see them grow, rather than fall into that statistical position."

The eldest of three children being raised by her mother, who's a nursing assistant, Misty recalls her late grandmother's quiet determination when she says, "I want to see my dreams flourish, and I want to be somebody."

She says she first joined community-service organizations, in middle school, in order to be productive while working toward her dream:

someday becoming a superstar singer. Back then, she says, she lacked confidence in her leadership skills and used street slang to communicate.

But as she became more involved and more confident — and heard her mother, grandmother, teachers, and other mentors tell her she could be anything she wanted to be — Misty's career goal changed. She says that now, after graduating from college, she wants to help build communities, especially inspiring the young people.

"My goal is working toward social change — working to develop unde-

veloped communities, like the ones where I was raised, and giving people who live there hope for change."

Such change, says Misty, could come with a seemingly basic project like the "art park" that Youth in Action is helping to develop in South Providence. The youth group surveyed a neighborhood and found that the residents wanted a place where their children could run and play — and also a place that would display sculpture and other art made by the residents. So Misty and the other Youth in Action members successfully lobbied the neighborhood's

City Council member for the necessary funds, and the residents will open their park this spring.

Apart from the project's obvious benefits, says Misty, the neighbors have learned through this experience that they have the power to bring about change.

Misty attributes her own sense of empowerment partly to the neighborhood where she grew up. "There are racial injustices all around," she says, but her South Providence community, with its mixture of many cultures, "is one of the reasons why I'm as strong as I am now."