

Cristina, Raymond, Crisbelly, & Aaron – Growing up at BronxWorks *BronxWorks After-School & Summer Camp Program*

Cristina's family has grown up at BronxWorks. Her two teenagers, Raymond (not pictured) and Crisbelly (right), started in the BronxWorks after-school and summer camp program in elementary school and attended camp every summer until they were too old to attend. They both felt so passionately about their experiences in these programs, they insisted their mom sign up their younger brother Aaron (or *Aaroncito*, as he's affectionately known) for BronxWorks summer camp.



A single mother working as a teacher's aide, Cristina depended on BronxWorks as a "safe place" where her children would be cared for during after-school hours—the period when unsupervised children and youth are most vulnerable to getting involved in delinquent or high-risk activities. She smiles widely as she expresses how much she "loves the staff here" who are always so "friendly and respectful." Cristina knows that she relied on the after-school and summer camp program when she needed it most. She stressed that it "helps the community a lot" and the many working parents within it. Cristina also observed how much all the children enjoy after-school activities and benefit from it; she feels that "this environment is good for them... I see the difference!"

Crisbelly, now 14, wholeheartedly agrees! Remembering her afterschool days, she exclaims: "It was great, because we all treated each other like family. We learned a lot of moral values... respect, responsibility, caring." She adds that themes like "go green" and healthy choices were always integrated into the program, and she's internalized this all as she's now an active community member at her high school, enjoying her time in a community service group and on the basketball team. And the children passed on to their mother what they were learning. For example, Cristina says that she took the BronxWorks emphasis on healthy eating to heart and improved the way she and her children eat at home too. Crisbelly reflected on the academic aspects of after-school as well, proudly noting that thanks to math tutoring during this time, she was advanced and ahead of the game for middle school.

At just eight years old, Aaron is most excited about his recent summer camp experience, where his favorite things to do were play games on the BronxWorks Community Center's play roof (pictured above) and swimming. "I want to be the best swimmer!" Aaron shyly declared. He is still working toward that goal, continuing swimming lessons with the BronxWorks aquatics program during the school year. Aaron also says that he "read tons of books" at camp this summer and enjoyed writing stories as well.

Cristina's oldest son Raymond is a busy high school senior with stellar math skills and SAT scores. He has a passion for music, which he hopes to pursue in college next year. Cristina credits BronxWorks with giving her children a positive, structured environment to grow up in outside of their home. They learned to focus on school and pursue their individual interests, while she was able to work, putting healthy food on the table. She says she is "so happy and grateful" – to those friends, donors, volunteers, and partners who make BronxWorks programs possible. Everyone at BronxWorks shares this gratitude with you and we are proud to say that Cristina, Raymond, Crisbelly, and Aaron are just four more examples of how, *together*, we are lifting lives and building futures, thanks to you!

The BronxWorks after-school and summer camp program provides both academic enrichment and social emotional learning programming to neighborhood children. Working parents rely on these programs to keep their children safe and ensure that the family wage-earners can keep their jobs and continue to support their families.