NEW YORK (CBSNewYork) — The coronavirus pandemic put pressure on families all over the Tri-State Area.

For kids growing up in the Bronx, there's a charity providing a program that gives them a place to go after school and help build their future.

It's the focus of this week's Snapshot New York with Steve Overmyer.

Walking through the halls he used to roam as a child, Mario Ynfante prepares for his new role as a group leader.
“This is a family environment for me. I feel like is my duty to show up every day,” Ynfante said.

He works at WHEDco, short for Women’s Housing and Economic Development Corporation, a nonprofit created to build affordable homes and help the youth through activities and education.

For nearly three decades, WHEDco has helped serve as a foundation for family stability. Every day, Ynfante ensures these kids have the support that benefitted him.

“It makes me happy. It honestly does. There’s no other rewarding feeling to me than being able to see people in my community happy,” he said. “To see people that look like me, that have experienced things like me be able to say, ‘Maybe one day I’m gonna send my kid to college.'”

The South Bronx is the poorest congressional district in America. Poverty is only one of their worries. It’s an image Ynfante is trying to change.

“I think the perception of the South Bronx is things that we see in movies. A lot of things that we see on social media. The Bronx is supposed to be this scary place. Crime ridden, dirty and full of undesirable people,” he said. “But in reality, I’ve been living here my 21 years of life and wouldn’t have rather grown up anywhere else.”

“WHEDco during this time has to be a time for them to decompress, has to be a time for them to disconnect a little bit,” Yfante told Overmyer.

“Just release a little,” Overmyer said.

“Yeah, just release a little. Release that energy, just be able to move around and be able to smile and be able to talk to their friends,” said Yfante.

In the South Bronx, 98% of the student body is a minority. Five years ago, the graduation rate was 53%. It’s now up to 60%, but still, only 35% of the students go to college.

Yfante is one of them. His role in this setting is to help set kids on a path to college.

Even through the pandemic, Yfante was helping children cope. His efforts caught the attention of the New York Rangers, who took time to honor him at Madison Square Garden.

“If I show them that I did it, they can do it, too. So, I can be a role model for them in some way or another,” said Yfante, who’s expected to graduate with a degree from Manhattan College this year.

Yfante is proving it’s not about where you’re from, it’s about where you’re headed.

Link: https://newyork.cbslocal.com/2021/05/27/mario-ynfante-whedco-south-bronx/