

Beating the odds



Roshea Williams gets a hug from her mentor, Bernada Baker, on Thursday after being awarded a \$25,000 scholarship at Julian High School in Chicago. Williams' grandfather Howard Williams is looking on from behind (center).

South Side teen's essay about struggles, hopes earns her money for college

By Courtney Greve, Staff writer

Roshea Williams gets her motivation from some unlikely sources. When the 17-year-old Julian High School honors student looks at her drug-addicted mother or thinks about her absentee father, it bolsters her drive to succeed.

"I say to myself, 'I want better than that,' " she said. "I don't think I'm better than anybody. I just know I can accomplish anything."

Roshea learned Thursday she is a little closer to achieving her dreams.

Her 500-word essay about her struggles and hopes for the future won a \$25,000 college scholarship from the Enhance Educational Foundation.

"I feel so privileged to receive this award," she told her classmates in Chicago's Washington Heights community. "I've gone through so much in my life, but I have what it takes to succeed."

In the essay, Roshea wrote, "I have come to learn that every move that I make can either help or hurt someone else; this is why I have to take a stand to break a generational curse and remain hopeful."

Dr. Steve Dayan, a plastic surgeon and foundation founder, said he was so impressed with Roshea's essay that he shared it with his children.

"She's mature, responsible, positive and focused," he said. "I was blown away by this young lady. She really stood out."

In the first year of the scholarship contest, 35 Chicago Public School students who are enrolled in the Education to Careers program submitted essays.

Roshea is part of the program's medical academy, which landed her a summer job as a pharmacy technician. She wants to become a pharmacist because she often helps her grandparents sort through their many medications.

Howard and Rosie Williams raised Roshea and her younger sister, Jessica.

"This is so wonderful," said Rosie Williams, 67. "I'm so happy and proud."

Principal William Harris said Roshea's achievement demonstrates the good things happening at Julian.

"We're starting to see the fruits of our labor," he said.

Since Harris came to the school six years ago, he said the number of Advanced Placement courses has increased from one to 10, and the average ACT score has jumped from 12.4 to 16.6.

Julian senior Bianca Williams, no relation to Roshea, was one of the essay contest's finalists, who each won a \$2,000 scholarship.

Like Roshea, Bianca was not raised by her parents, and she wants to pursue a career in medicine. Bianca's essay focused on the positive influence of her great-grandfather, Major Ligon.

"He taught me and my little brother, Dion, that we could do anything," she said.

Other finalists were Leila Patterson, Gwendolyn Brooks Academy; Norbella Lagunas, Benito Juarez Academy; and Oleksandr Grehko, Sullivan High School.

Roshea Williams said the next hurdle is picking a college. With the help of her mentor, Bernada Baker, Roshea applied to 13 schools.

"After surviving (the application process), I can get through any hard thing," she said.

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