

ST THOMAS' OUTREACH SCHOLARS IN THEIR OWN WORDS...

It all began with Aishia. An intelligent teenager with a sweet smile, she was a natural leader and role model for her diminutive charges at The Church of the Advocate after School Program. Aishia planned to be the first person in her family to go to college but it was a daunting task to cobble together enough grants, scholarships and loans to underwrite her first year at Virginia Commonwealth University. As Mimi Kepner and I observed her pursuit of this elusive goal, we were struck by the same thought: now was the time to initiate a scholarship program we had often discussed. We applied to the Fernley Outreach Fund and in 2003 awarded \$1,000 scholarships to Aishia D. and Jessica I. for academic achievement and community service. And that was just the beginning. The St. Thomas' Outreach Scholarship Fund, founded the following year, has continued to make these awards on an annual basis to a growing number of worthy applicants, expanding its reach to include a nursing student in Malawi (through G.A.I.A), a resident of Our Little Roses School in Honduras as well as inner-city high school graduates in Philadelphia. In 2009, there were 14 scholarships presented to newly-matriculated and continuing college students.

Here, **IN THEIR OWN WORDS** are some of the stories and feelings expressed on the applications:

Vickie D. – senior at the University of Pittsburgh

“Some life challenges that I had was trying to find the real me. I was a leader on the streets but only in a negative way. People followed and did whatever I said. I had to find the real Vickie. The decision to go to college has affected my life in a positive way because I have...matured a lot by being out of my comfort zone.”

Allela G. – Community College of Philadelphia

“I am elated that you are allowing me to reapply for the scholarship. It is a great help! I am still going to school part time and working. My mother injured her knee so she is unable to work so I help her as much as possible.”

Mauriceo J. – Freshman at Robert Morris University

On life challenges: “My two biggest life challenges are being in foster care and dealing with my Mom's death.”

Matthew B. – senior at Penn State University

“Dear Outreach Community of St. Thomas' Church,

I am truly thankful for the donation you all have provided me with to fund my college expenses. It has and still is a tough financial era in today's economy, so to receive this generous check of \$1,000 has brought the biggest smile to my face. Every good deed will be noticed, by spectators and especially God. I just wanted you all to know that this deed you have done for me will be paid back to you all in full. Whether it's me and a few of my buddies coming to do some cleaning at your church or me succeeding and giving back to the youth of my community, St. Thomas' Church will be recognized. My goal in

life is to provide the help and support to encourage others to engage in positive lifestyles.”

Fatima W. – Freshman at Gwynedd Mercy College

“I am motivated to be a nurse because I have the compassion for all people. Becoming a nurse means I will have the ability to help others and make a difference in their lives. This is my ultimate goal. I will look forward to college and a nursing career.”

Leeya S. – Freshman at Lock Haven University

Hobbies: “Helping others and helping the community”

Life Challenges: “Paying for college and growing up without support”

Jessica I. – Lincoln University

“Thanks again ever so much for helping me these past couple of years. It has been greatly appreciated. To think what I would have done without Saint Thomas’ is scary. I just thank God that He put me in your path.”

Emanuel D. -- Community College of Philadelphia

“I believe that my Mom helped me decide to pursue a college career because she stayed on my back about how she wanted to further my education and be better than the people out on the streets. So I decided to take all the positive things she said and put them into effect.”

Jonathan L. – Senior at Penn State University

“What helped me decide to pursue a post high school education was my desire to follow God’s plan for my life and be all that He has called me to be. A college degree opens up many opportunities in which I can prepare myself for the plans God has for me. One of my favorite sayings is “Do your best and let God do the rest.” Pursuing a degree is my way of doing the best with the talents and skills he has blessed me with.”

Roberta C. – The Restaurant School at Walnut Hill College

“I always wanted to pursue a college education. But when I had my son I knew I had no choice but to go to college! I decided that I would like to open up my own bakery.” Later that year: “I am sorry it took me so long to thank you and the St. Thomas’ Outreach Committee. I am majoring in Pastry Arts and I really enjoy it. I’m doing well in all my classes. This term I’m taking Nutrition, Wines, Cost Accounting, Ice Creams, Bavarians and Mousses. I will be taking a trip to France in the fall. Thank you for allowing me to apply, it’s such a big help!”

Nakeshia W. -- Sophomore at the University of Wisconsin

“I was raised in West Philadelphia and went to Catholic school all my life. I am the first child of my mom and the second of my dad. This is unique because I am the oldest and the middle child. I also come from a large family that truly loves music. I say this because the love of music has inspired me to play the sax and the drums. This is only a tiny part of who I am, but it makes up an important part. I mention this first because it

teaches me to learn how to get where I want to go. It has also built my will never to give up.”

Rachel E. – Sophomore at Haverford College

When applying for a scholarship for her second year, Rachel sent a progress report: “My first year at Haverford College was a culture shock. It was different from Philadelphia, but I was able to find friends. The first semester was hard for me because I was not used to having a large amount of free time to study, so I procrastinated on my work. However I learned how to manage my time by making a schedule. During my first semester, I joined the squash team and women of color. I also was able to volunteer at Squashsmarts which is a program that promotes education and squash for urban youth. I would tutor students from Charles Drew Elementary. During the second semester, I was elected for the office of multiculturalism for 2009 school year. I became involved in the Haverford community more. I helped plan Sister Circle which is a celebration of sisterhood practicing African traditions such as pouring libations. Not only was I able to get involved with Haverford’s community more but I also enjoyed my classes. I took a second semester of French, Writing Seminar, Religious writing of James Baldwin and Calculus II. I enjoyed all my classes and I decided to major in math. I am happy with my first year at Haverford and next year I plan to live in the Black Cultural Center where I will host, promote and plan black cultural events.”

Khalid P. – Penn State University

“As a child, growing up in low income housing, finances and troubling peer pressure was a block that tried to stay in the way of my life’s progress. There were things that my peers wanted and expected me to do that I did not do. Over my teenage years I had to let go of many friends because we were thinking on different mindsets. I also was raised in rough neighborhood. I had a single mother who makes enough to get us through. However, some privileges we were unable to have because of the little money we had. The decision to go to college can only make me do better. I will have a degree so that I can be a professional. I can also be an inspiration to other people in my family. I can start a college attendance trend. The scholarship will help make it happen and I will be what I always wanted to be.”

LaShauna T. -- Senior at Rosemont College

“I just received the scholarship check. Words do not describe how thankful I am for such a generous gift. You are all angels and you are that helping hand that I have needed when I realize I cannot do it all on my own. Thank you SO very much!”

Pam Serra