

NATIONAL POST

Wednesday, August 27, 2008

Ex-Crown wards land scholarships

Presented by

NP Network
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Published: Wednesday, August 27, 2008



Chavenne Stamp looks back on the past few volatile years of her young life and marvels at her transformation.

A Jamaican immigrant at 10 years old, she was placed in the care of the Catholic Children's Aid Society of Toronto not long after, shuffled from foster family to foster family and was pregnant with her second child by the age of 16.

Parenthood acted as a wake-up call for the young woman, who once considered herself an adolescent rebel. Now, she is entering her second year of a police foundations program at Humber College and plans to make her way into social work at York University.

She says it could not have happened without the help of the Hope for Children Foundation, which supports the Catholic Children's Aid Society.

The foundation will award 84 former Crown wards with scholarships to pursue post secondary education valued in total at \$180,000 in a ceremony today at the University of Toronto's Hart House. Ms. Stamp is among the recipients for the second year in a row. The scholarships range from \$1,500 to an \$18,000 scholarship that covers tuition, books and residence for a student accepted into St. Michael's College at the U of T.

Since 1986, the Hope for Children Foundation has awarded more than \$1.2-million in scholarship funding for Crown or former Crown wards.

The money goes a long way for young people who don't have a family to turn to for help, said Mary Bowyer, executive director of the foundation.

"One of the youth said to me last year that when she was living with her family, even when she was in care for a period of time, she felt things were always taken away from her. One thing she was able to keep was her education," she said.

Eric Crawford, another scholarship recipient, was lucky enough to have been

raised by just one foster family, with whom he remains close and celebrates holidays. His biological mother refused to sign over Crown wardship unless her three children were placed in the same home, so family ties are very

important to Mr. Crawford, now 25. He attributes his success to that, and the emotional and financial support the CCAS has provided over the years. Social workers set incremental goals and encouraged him to continue playing hockey or lacrosse.

"Some kids in my situation were hindered and held back, while I was able to propel forward," said Mr. Crawford, who graduated from the University of Guelph and will start teachers' college at the University of Western Ontario next month.

As a teen Ms. Stamp, now 21, focused on school sports, and it wasn't until she gave birth to her son and daughter that she saw the merit of a good education. She enrolled in Women Moving Forward, a program for single mothers at the Jane Finch Community and Family Centre, and quickly became someone others looked up to.

"When she started the program she had no idea what she wanted to do," said Tanya Morris, a program worker. "Now every time she comes in there's something else that she's accomplished, something else she's achieved."

Ms. Stamp earned an 81% average in college last year, and still counts on the support of the CCAS, which acts as a surrogate "grandmother" for her two children who are temporarily in foster care while she finishes school. Her next goal is to study social work at York, so she can spread her transformational ways throughout her neighbourhood.

"I found that my passion is there," she said. "Our community has had a very negative name for how many years now, and living there I don't see that. I would like to be a part of the group that shows the inner beauty of the community that a lot of outsiders are unaware of."

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