



Children's Defense Fund

For Immediate Release:

SENATOR HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON HONORS FIVE NEW YORK CITY STUDENTS THAT *BEAT THE ODDS* AT THE 2006 CHILDREN'S DEFENSE FUND'S WINTER BENEFIT

New York, NY, January 12, 2006 – Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton served as the keynote speaker today at The Children's Defense Fund (CDF) 2006 Winter Benefit. Marian Wright Edelman, CDF's Founder and President, joined Senator Clinton at the Rainbow Room, where actress Marlo Thomas and singer/activist Harry Belafonte presented five New York City high school students with CDF's Beat The Odds® Awards.

The Beat the Odds® program was initiated by CDF in 1990 and celebrates the positive potential of young people by providing financial help, as well as public recognition and networking opportunities. The 2006 award winners are Timothy Donnell Anderson, Judith Rosena, Abu Bakarr Sesay, Ramell Stone and Teresa Xu. Each of these students has overcome enormous challenges such as poverty, violence, homelessness, and substance abuse to achieve academic success and serve their community. Their strength and determination have propelled them to truly beat the odds.

"Every child in this nation has the right to the health care they need, to a head start so they enter school ready to learn, a safe community and a place to call home. No child should grow up in poverty. This country needs to end child poverty in this decade. We must transform our nation and make it just and right and safe for all children. These are the real moral values that we have to stand for," said Marian Wright Edelman.

The Children's Defense Fund honored Susan P. Thomas for her dedication to improving the lives of New York City's children. The families, friends, teachers and counselors who have helped these students succeed were also recognized at the event.

Beat the Odds® Winners Profiles

Timothy Donnell Anderson

Brooklyn High School of the Arts student, Timothy Donnell Anderson is living proof of the resilience and determination of the human spirit. He was born into a broken family that continued to crumble under the pressure of substance abuse. Timothy's mother left him and his three siblings to be raised by their grandmother. He later found out that his mother was HIV-positive. Timothy's family was anchored by his grandmother and older cousin Steven who served as his father figure, until October of 2002 when Steven committed suicide. Despite all of these obstacles, Timothy says that it is his grandmother that keeps him going.

In June, he will be the first of his grandmother's children and grandchildren to graduate from high school. He says of his experiences thus far: "There have been bumps along the way that tried to knock me down. Some did and some did not, but no matter what the situation I still got back up and continued on my way." While attending Brooklyn High School of the Arts, Timothy has participated in the Architectural, Construction and Engineering Mentors program; excelled in the NAACP New York City Academic, Cultural, Technological and Scientific Olympics Program; and, is currently interning at an architectural firm. Timothy is a successful student who has earned the respect of fellow students and teachers alike, and who has turned his own life experience into a teaching tool that has helped to educate his classmates about HIV/AIDS and how it affects families and communities.

Judith Rosena

Judith Rosena is living proof that no odds are insurmountable. Judith has risen above numerous obstacles to become a student leader at Brooklyn College Academy High School, where she serves as Vice President of the student government; is a member of the model U.N. team; and, will be initiated into Arista, the school's National Honor Society. She has achieved all this despite having witnessed and endured a lifetime of physical abuse. When Judith was just five years old, she witnessed her father break her mother's neck. Showing her strength, her experiences drove her to help other domestic violence survivors. Judith has received little academic support from her family, but she has maintained an excellent academic record. She has dedicated herself to getting the most out of her education despite the fact that she gets no encouragement at home. She says: "I know that a good education is the only thing that can deliver me from my situation. I am determined not to let these bad experiences hold me back." She has not let her situation define her and has charted her own course to success.

Abu Bakarr Sesay

DeWitt Clinton High School senior Abu Bakarr Sesay personifies the word survivor. Born in Sierra Leone, Africa, Abu has survived a broken family, poverty, homelessness, countless relocations and a civil war. His life has always been guided by his strong desire for education. He worked in low-wage jobs, barely making enough in a week to pay for one day's lunch, to scrape together the fees for school in Sierra Leone. He says of this experience, "I saved the little money that came my way to pay for my school fees and buy my uniform, because I wanted an education more than life itself."

When civil war reached his hometown of Freetown, Abu's home was destroyed and he was forced to live on the streets and once again could not pay his school fees. He began doing housework for a family friend who brought him to the United States. Upon his arrival, he was forced to begin high school two years behind where he left off, but was never deterred in his quest for education. His employer and travel companion were abusive to him and another young woman whom he had brought with him to the United States, locking them out of their home and denying them food. After sustaining serious physical injuries, Abu was placed into a group home and then placed with the foster family with whom he currently lives. Amid these turbulent times, Abu has managed to make it to his senior year at DeWitt Clinton High School, where he is poised to graduate this spring and continue in the pursuit of his dream of becoming an international criminal lawyer. Robert Diamond, Senior Social Worker at DeWitt Clinton says, "Abu is an example for us all of a person who was victimized, but refused to define himself as a victim."

Ramell Stone

Ramell Stone is a senior at Independence High School, an achievement many thought he would never reach. Born to a teenage mother and a father who was incarcerated, Ramell has overcome a broken family and drug abuse to become an involved and accomplished student. In middle school, Ramell was antagonized by his peers and lost

focus. He turned to drugs to escape the troubles at home and at school, and after his freshman year of high school, Ramell was arrested. Instead of being sent to jail, Ramell was fortunate that a judge saw his potential and gave him the option to attend a therapeutic drug treatment program called Phoenix Academy. Ramell entered the program with no school credits and has worked so hard that he is now about to graduate from high school. He calls this opportunity, "A chance that changed my life."

When Ramell's court mandate was lifted he was in the middle of a semester but opted to remain at Phoenix Academy so he would not lose the course credits for which he had worked so hard. Now that he is back in New York City, he has become very involved in the Phoenix Academy After Care program. He says: "I came to Phoenix for a reason. That reason was to get a good mind set. Despite all the hardships I have been through; I'm still standing; I'm stronger than ever; I know the possibilities are endless."

Teresa Xu

Teresa Xu has proven that struggle is just a pit stop on the way to success. Raised in China by her paternal grandparents until she was 13, Teresa left the only family she had known for a new country and the promise of a better future. She came to the United States to live with her mother, stepfather and their children in Brooklyn. Teresa found that she did not fit in with her mother and her new family. She found sanctuary at FDR High School where she quickly mastered English, became involved in the Chinese Cultural Club and found a family away from home. During her sophomore year of high school, Teresa was removed from her home by Child Protective Services and was placed with her maternal grandmother. Even with all of her challenges, Teresa has persevered and maintained an excellent grade point average, traveling four hours everyday in order to complete her sophomore year at FDR, the school that had become her refuge. Teresa now attends John Bowne High School, holds two jobs and volunteers in her community. She is committed to furthering her education and pursuing a career that will allow her to help people overcome the kinds of challenges she has so bravely mastered.

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