

## **Kendall Franklin ~ Urban Hero**

I am Kendall Franklin, a not quite 20-year-old hunter college student and graduate of Youth Advocacy Center's *Getting Beyond the System*<sup>®</sup> Self-advocacy Seminar. I would say that I am one of the inner city, urban youths you read about in the books and hear about on TV. However, receiving this award shows me that urban youth is not a label that fits a stereotype. I believe I have overcome adversity with hard work and a strong will. However, I cannot say that I did it alone. I have many to thank such as friends, family and Youth Advocacy Center, among others.

I was raised in Harlem until I graduated 8<sup>th</sup> grade. As a pretty big kid I was always riddled with ideas of playing pro football in the future, so much that I came to love the sport. However, in an interview with my junior high school principal, he told me that it was highly unlikely that I would be in the NFL, especially considering that at that time there were no jr. high or high school teams in Harlem and I was too big for pee-wee. So from there I decided I wanted to be a businessman, but I left it at that. I wouldn't really revisit the subject until my senior year in high school, during which I took a statistics course, which aroused a real interest in accounting and business.

Lets fast-forward a little to the college years. Things were hard for my family during my freshman semester and we ended up in a homeless shelter. I once heard that most people do not end up homeless out of laziness, but because of a series of unfortunate events all occurring at once. That was certainly true in my case. The shelter life was not too bad except for the fact that it used to be a school and therefore had school "facilities." The shelter had plenty of activities to keep people occupied and among them was the YAC's GBS Seminar. I did not want to take it, thinking it would be like all the

other career readiness courses. (Been there done that.) But I was wrong, it was very empowering and played a large role in adding that confidence I needed to be where I am today. Not to mention that I ended up with an ally in Brian McDermott, HBO's financial manager, who has given me plenty of tips on how to reach my goal of becoming a successful accountant. Since finishing the seminar, I have worked under the Coalition of the Homeless as a counselor for their Camp Homeward Bound and as a site coordinator for their Bound for Success after-school program, trying my best to leave a lasting impression on the younger children of New York. I have also remained with YAC, helping them in their journey to spread GBS and affect the lives of many other teens in the country as they continue to play a large role in my growth, helping me to gain experience in as many ways as I can. Whether through meetings with city council members about funding, or delivering things, doing outreach, writing, or coming to events such as this one, with their help as well as others, I plan on continuing my growth.

I believe the Urban Hero Award teaches that there are many ways to be a hero. Of course there are the many heroes who save lives every day. But there are also the many heroes who inspire others like them to do well and try their best to set a prime example for the people around them. So I am honored to know that I am seen as one of those people. Thank you.