



Village of hope provides a stepping stone for teen resident

Despite the many hardships she has encountered throughout her life, 18-year-old Villages of Hope resident, Tawanis Smith has kept her chin up and vowed to get a college education. Her determination and promise were recently recognized by representatives of the Palm Beach County Coalition for Children, Inc., who awarded her with a 2009 "Turn To the Future" scholarship which will cover books and fees when she attends Palm Beach Community College in the fall.

With the help of the scholarship, Smith plans to pursue a nursing degree, with a concentration in geriatrics. Her ultimate goal is to become a forensic pathologist. At the age of 16, while in an unsafe living situation, Smith made the

decision to become a resident at the faith-based child welfare organization Place of Hope – a decision that she says changed her life.

"I was determined to maintain my dreams at any cost," she said. "After I joined the stable environment at Place of Hope, my grades soared. Thanks to the love and support of everyone at Place of Hope/Villages of Hope, I was reassured that I could achieve anything I wanted to."

When Smith turned 18 in April, she joined Place of Hope's affiliate Villages of Hope, an independent living residential support program for emancipated foster youth and homeless youth. With the support of Villages of Hope Director, Linsey Driskill, Smith applied for and attained the scholarship.

"Tawanis is an excellent example of how being in a stable environment can completely turn a child's life around," said Driskill. "Once she went to live at Place of Hope, she worked very hard on her studies, and completely improved her grades. I'm proud of her not only for winning the scholarship, but for everything she has achieved over the past two years."

"Villages of Hope has been a wonderful stepping stone to the successful future I know I'll have," said Smith. "My life experiences have made me who I am today – I've learned how to persevere, remain determined, and work hard to do well. This scholarship has brought me even one step closer to achieving my dreams."

The mission of the Palm Beach County Coalition for

Children, Inc., is to enhance the quality of life and safety for children and families in Palm Beach County through education, advocacy and collaboration.

For more information, visit www.childrenpbc.org.

Villages of Hope, located at 3528 Burma Circle in Lake Park, provides independent living residential support and essential life-skills development for emancipated foster youth and homeless youth in need. An affiliate of Place of Hope, Inc., Villages of Hope is dedicated to providing a supportive and proactive living and learning environment for youth who "age out" of the state's foster care system.

For more information about Villages of Hope, call 561-775.7195 or visit www.villagesofhope.net. ■



Tawanis Smith