

Reynaldo Piniella

As the first person in my family to graduate high school and move on to college I have guided myself and created my own path to success. I will attend Brooklyn College next year and plan to double major in Economics and Theatre. I chose to pursue these very different fields because business and acting are my two passions in life. My dream is to be a professional actor and own my own business. I always dreamed of attending a big university in order to pursue my dreams but my family's economic situation couldn't handle the hefty cost of one. Even the cost of a public college is a lot to my family. Without a college education my big dreams will never become a reality. This award will help me achieve my goals and make my dreams come true.

Unlike most people I am not a "product of my environment". I live in a crime infested part of Brooklyn, New York and most kids end up forgetting about school and ending up on the streets. In order to keep myself from falling into the same situation I joined the All-Stars Project which provides after-school programs for kids. I joined Youth Onstage! and the Development School for Youth in order to pursue my goals as a business man and a performer. Through Youth Onstage! I have helped produce plays that are socially aware and make people see things in a different way. We did a play called "Our City" which challenged stereotypes in New York City and a play called "Fine Print" which tried to break away the stereotypes of gender.

As a 17 year old there is only so much I can do to fix the problems in my community. I have made efforts to not only improve my community but also my city. I was involved in a protest against the violence in the Far Rockaway community. We stood on the steps of City Hall and called on Mayor Bloomberg to increase the police force and

create more after-school programs for kids to keep them off the street. I am a member of Interfaith Ministries in Jamaica, Queens and I will be writing, directing and acting in a play that will be in my church's fundraising concert.

I was recently told I will be awarded the 2008 Young Leaders for Change award. It is awarded to a select few teenagers out of the hundreds involved in the All-Stars Project. The award carries with it the responsibility of establishing yourself as a leader not only in the youth programs but in the world. Working to better the community should be the job of everyone who lives there. If everyone took charge and became leaders instead of sitting back and watching, this world would be a much better place. I would like to thank the HESUS Fund for allowing me the chance to pursue my dreams. Without it my dreams might just remain a thought of my imagination.