Overcoming Homelessness and Tackling a College Degree

Scholar Profile: Kahlin Kelly

By Victoria Vickers

Kahlin Kelly will never forget the range of emotions that flashed across her aunt’s face the day a family friend revealed the little secret Kahlin was carrying.

“She was smiling when she answered the phone,” Kahlin recalled, “but then her expression went from disappointment to anger to rage. It was the scariest moment of my life.”

It was Kahlin’s moment of truth, the culmination of months of being in a state of denial about her pregnancy. It was a day she’d anticipated yet pushed to the back of her mind as she packed her things, a little each day, hiding behind a fortress of little white lies and baggy clothes. Backed into a corner, Kahlin tearfully confessed. And just as she had feared, her aunt asked her to leave.

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We’re Recruiting Generation Hope Sponsors

We are looking for YOU!

By Caroline Griswold

Are you looking for a rewarding giving experience? Do you want to directly impact a teen parent’s future through mentoring? Then apply today to become a Generation Hope Sponsor! Applications are available now at www.supportgenerationhope.org/become-a-sponsor and are due June 1, 2013.

A Scholar and her son (Photo: Erika Layne Photography)
If you knew that one conversation could open a whole new world for someone, wouldn’t you make it your mission to have those conversations whenever possible? So much of a teen parent’s pursuit of a college degree has to do with awareness—someone telling them and showing them that it can be done. We provide community workshops at local schools, organizations, and social service agencies in an effort to raise this awareness for pregnant or parenting high school students or recent graduates. In fact, Generation Hope became an official partner of the D.C. Public Schools New Heights Program in 2012, which operates a school-based support program for teen parents across the city. To date, Generation Hope has reached more than 80 students across the D.C. area through these workshops.

Our work is as much about reaching into the community as it is about supporting teen parents while they attend college. We have a motto—if we conduct a workshop that encourages just one teen parent to go to college, then we have succeeded. The outcomes for that family will be completely different because of that decision and because of our efforts.

The Hope Conference, which takes place on June 29, 2013, is another opportunity for us to raise awareness. It is a day-long training for our current Scholars on topics such as leadership, financial literacy, and parenting skills, and also provides information on applying to college for 20-25 pregnant or parenting high school students. This day is a game-changer for the attendees—a day when they make a decision that could impact their family for generations.

I want to thank The Columbia Foundation for providing funding that helps to make our community workshops possible in Howard County, Md., and Capital Cause for providing a $1,000 grant towards our Hope Conference this year. Without this vital funding, we couldn’t spread the word that college is possible for teen parents.
“I wanted to tell her as soon as I found out, but I didn’t have the guts,” Kahlin explained. “I was on birth control. I was determined not to be like all the others in my family who were single, teen parents. I was really disappointed in myself.”

Kahlin was a senior in high school in Miami, Fla. when she became pregnant. By the time she graduated, she was 18 years old, pregnant and homeless. Taking a leap of faith, Kahlin moved to Washington D.C. to live with paternal relatives until she had the baby. Six months after her son Makai was born, Kahlin began taking classes at Prince George’s Community College in Largo, Md. She knew that earning a degree would increase her chances of landing the kind of job she needed to provide for her son.

Seeking out resources has become second nature for Kahlin, who has now moved into her own apartment in D.C. The Healthy Babies Project had helped her transition from pregnant teenager to teen mom and from jobless to employed as their administrative assistant, which helped her land her next job as a concierge. And it was also through that organization that Kahlin found hope – Generation Hope.

“When Miss Nicole told us her story, I said ‘This lady is living my life!’” Kahlin said, reflecting on the day Generation Hope made a presentation at the Healthy Babies Project. “That really gave me hope.”

After the presentation, Kahlin introduced herself, and a year later, she applied. “When I got a call from Miss Kendria, I was ecstatic,” she said. “I was really persistent. I had been following up with them for a whole year. When I had my interview, they remembered me.”

This fall, Kahlin will go from a part-time to full-time student, pursuing a degree in Mortuary Science thanks to the support she receives from Generation Hope and her Sponsor Sarah Cottingham.

“[Kahlin] is mature beyond her years,” said Sarah, whose mother was a teen mom. “I know she’s just about to turn 21, but she could easily be 31. Kahlin has gone through so much in the last nine months. Most people would have given up. She is such an inspiration.”

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**SENDING HOPE YOUR WAY**

**An Act of Support, Encouragement, and Faith**

**College Matters for ALL Students**

_By Dr. DeRionne Pollard  
President, Montgomery College  
Vice President, Generation Hope Board of Directors_

I distinctly remember learning about the power of giving when I was in the third grade, thanks to a girl named Melba. Growing up in Chicago, I rarely left the house without a warm coat, scarf, and hat. I always lost my mittens, and my father always bought me a new pair. But I remember noticing that Melba never had any mittens. So one day, I gave her mine. When I nervously apologized and explained to my father why I needed new mittens yet again, he said, “You always have the right to give away in order to help somebody else.” It was a profound moment for me and from then on, I have been determined to help others whenever I can. I grew up steeped in the adage that “to whom much is given, much is expected.”

I believe it is essential to provide access to a higher education for those members of our community who may not otherwise consider college an option, including African American, Hispanic, low-income, and first generation college students. I can’t help but recognize that I was one of them once. Two scholarships made a difference to my college education, helping me become the first member of my family to attend college. My home church supported every member who was graduating high school with a $500 scholarship, and simultaneously, a private organization awarded me a book award to help cover the cost of books and supplies. A product of public schooling, I had no idea that we even had to buy our own books! But helping lighten the financial burden is not the exclusive, or even the primary, reason I believe in the importance of supporting students working toward college degrees. It is also about the way this kind of support makes the recipient feel. I think about the way I felt receiving those scholarships; they made me realize that members of my community, even strangers, believed in me. They were quite literally invested in my success. I went to college with a greater degree of confidence that any academic degree was within my grasp. Ever since then, philanthropy for me has been an act of support, encouragement, and faith. Giving to others, like Melba, is a way of living up to the expectations that come with being a former recipient of generosity.

Early on in my college experience, I began to learn who I was, who I wanted to be, and who I could be with the mentorship and support of my new community. You could say I have never left college! I turned my love of reading and of learning into a bachelor’s degree, and then a Master’s degree, and finally a Ph.D. And here I am today — President of Montgomery College.

When I welcome students to Montgomery College, I tell them that no matter who they are, they are in the right place to actualize their dreams, carve their own future, and make their mark on the world. By supporting Generation Hope, I am telling our Scholars the same thing.

*Did you know?*  
To date, Generation Hope has provided nearly $25,000 in tuition assistance to teen parents attending college.

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*Dr. DeRionne Pollard*

*Scholar Jenny Chacon, who attends Montgomery College, plays with her son during the annual Valentine’s Day Party at Paint Your Own Pottery in Fairfax, Va. To see all of the photos, please go to [www.supportgenerationhope.org/gallery](http://www.supportgenerationhope.org/gallery). (Photo: Erika Layne Photography)*

*"I went to college with a greater degree of confidence that any academic degree was within my grasp."*
Tish Baldez is usually not home in the afternoons. But last fall, while channel surfing on a rare day home from work, she stumbled across “The Steve Harvey Show” featuring Nicole Lynn Lewis, founder of Generation Hope, talking about the program alongside two Scholars. Tish was moved to tears.

She started typing an email to Nicole. She was so emotional that her words “took me about an hour to get out.” For Tish, it hit close to home. One of her sisters, Melanie Ellis Nelson, was a mother at age 18. As Tish put it, “I didn’t know what I wanted to do, but I knew I wanted to help.”

On the show, Liberty University donated $5,000 to Generation Hope. Tish decided her Philadelphia-based company, P31 Consulting, where she is a partner and owner, would match the amount in honor of Melanie. Donating, she says, “was a good representation of who we are as a company.”

Unlike many teen mothers, Melanie had a great support system. “We knew her life was going to change, but we rallied around her,” said Tish. “It was hard for my sister; she fell apart. But she still did it. These girls need to know they can do it, too.”

Melanie knows that she was blessed because her family encouraged her. She says, “There are many teen mothers who find themselves completely derailed by their pregnancy. Some choose to abandon their dreams and live a very unhappy life. Generation Hope can show teen mothers that they don’t have to take this path.”

As for her sister’s donation, Melanie says, “I felt honored that she would think of me in such regard while supporting other teen mothers who need assistance.”

Tish says, “There are thousands of reasons why teens end up in these situations. We need to send the message that their life didn’t end, they aren’t destroyed, and everything can turn out. They have the opportunity to celebrate and enjoy life.”

Be A Part Of The Celebration of Education!

Generation Hope’s 2013 Gala: June 28th!

If you have yet to purchase your ticket for “Pep Rally Under the Stars,” you better hurry! Our keynote speaker is Academy Award Nominated Actress and D.C. Native Taraji P. Henson. Ms. Henson knows firsthand how important Generation Hope’s mission is, as she became pregnant with her son while attending Howard University. Come dressed in your best attire and your college memorabilia and be prepared to party the night away for a great cause! We will also have a silent auction with items you will not find anywhere else, like plates hand painted by Scholars, their children, and their Sponsors, a tennis lesson and lunch with tennis player Zina Garrison, and more!

Get your tickets, table, or sponsorship today at www.supportgenerationhope.org/gala!
How did you become involved?
I had been receiving emails and mail regarding the organization, but it wasn’t until my brother invited me to attend the Gala in June 2012 that I learned more and knew that I had to become involved with such an inspiring and amazing organization. I met with Kendria to discuss the Volunteer Coordinator position, and during the meeting I could see her passion for Generation Hope. This was a team that I definitely wanted to be a part of.

What has surprised you most thus far?
The staff is beyond dedicated! Everyone wears more than one hat. Also everyone is so friendly, not only to the Scholars and Sponsors, but everyone who comes in contact with Generation Hope in some way, shape, or form.

What would you tell someone who is thinking about volunteering?
Come join the team! You get to meet and work with amazing people, but most importantly you are donating your time to support and encourage our future, the Scholars!