

Crossroads program gives kids hope, direction

By Lauren Beckham Falcone | Thursday, May 6, 2010 | <http://www.bostonherald.com> | Lifestyle



CJ Haddad is as full of plans as he is poised.

"I'm going to Suffolk University in the fall and want to have a career in sports broadcasting," said the Brockton 17-year-old over a burger and a Coke in Boston on Tuesday. "I'm a good writer, and I know everything about sports and I know I would be great working on NESN or a newspaper or wherever."

He wasn't this confident five years ago.

CJ's dad had died. He took care of his mother. He was in the 7th grade and on his way to becoming invisible.

But his guidance counselor at North Junior High School in Brockton saw a smart boy about to get lost in the shuffle. The counselor nominated him for Crossroads for Kids C5 New England, a five-year leadership program for at-risk kids that includes camp, a Wyoming wilderness trek, a college tour,

community service, cultural events and workshops on college, finances and employment.

"When they approached me about it, I didn't want to leave my mother. I was shy. I was in a bubble," said CJ, now a senior at Cardinal Spellman High School. "But I went. And it changed my life."

CJ will graduate along with about 35 other kids from the C5 program tomorrow night during a ceremony at **Faneuil Hall**. For 75 years, Crossroads for Kids has plucked thousands of children and teens out of environments filled with abuse, violence, neglect, poverty and homelessness and given them a space to feel safe. Originally a summer camp offshoot of the Boys and Girls Clubs, the camps include Camp Wing in Duxbury, Camp Mitton in Brewster and Camp Lapham in Ashby. It changed its name to Crossroads for Kids in 1998 and four years later began providing year-round services. Alumni include former Boston Mayor Ray Flynn, Gov. Michael Dukakis, the Wahlberg brothers and **Ben Affleck**.

Marisela Milian used to be the last to raise her hand in class. Today, the Brockton High School junior, in her fourth year at C5, is a top student and this year's Miss Massachusetts Teen Beautiful Latina. And yes, she carries her sash in her purse.

"I have a lot of public appearances," she said, laughing. When she talks about life before C5, she turns serious.

"I used to say no to things. I lived in my own world. Now I am the first to volunteer for something at my school. I'm different."

Janasha "Shawty" Holmes, 17, of Dorchester has been a member of Crossroads for eight years. When she first came to camp, she was the primary caregiver for her two toddler sisters.

"I never let people know about me," she said. "I was like a mother to my sisters and like a grownup."

Now she's a mentor in the apprentice program and a junior staff member.

"I have confidence," she said. "I feel like a big sister to my sisters, not their mother. Because of Crossroads, I feel like anything is possible."

For more information about admission, volunteer opportunities and donations, go to crossroads4kids.org or call 781-834-2700.

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