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## Community role model nabs scholarship

Award will help winner pursue studying social work at York U

Tags: Education, Social Work, Good News, Sarah Bashir, Investing In Our Div, York University, Don Mills Collegiate, Rights Of Passage Pr, Woodgreen Community, Children's Aid Socie, Beautiful Hair Beaut

By Alima Hotakie

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Neighbourhoods: Don Mills

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PHOTO COURTESY SARAH BASHIR

ALL SMILES: Sarah Bashir says the Investing in Our Diversity scholarship she received will help her pursue her studies in Social Work at York University.

Teachers told Sarah Bashir in elementary school that her university outlook was bleak. The reasons: she was too talkative and had poor writing skills.

Fast-forward to 2011, Bashir who is now 18, is on her way to study social work at York University.

"I've never listened to other people's thoughts," said the Don Mills Collegiate Institute graduate. "I pushed all the negative stuff behind me."

Her exceptional grades and grassroots community involvement earned her a \$1,000 Investing in Our Diversity Scholarship from Toronto Community Housing and Scadding Court Community Centre.

Bashir said the scholarship helped to lessen her financial worries and made post-secondary education a reality.

"I'm able to reach my goals because school costs a lot," she said.

And that's one of the reasons behind the scholarship, said Susanne Burkhardt the director of development and community engagement at Scadding Court.

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"There are systemic barriers to accessing education," said Burkhardt. "This (scholarship) makes it possible for young people to pursue their education."

Besides the financial aspect, the award also boosted Bashir's morale.

"The award made me feel proud," she said. "I can succeed in whatever I want to be ... It gave me confidence."

Bashir began volunteering at the age of 15. She joined the Rights of Passage Program at Woodgreen Community Services. The group educates black youth on their history and motivates them to get involved in their respective communities, she said.

She's also involved with the Children's Aid Society's Beautiful Hair, Beautiful Me Program, where she teaches Afro-Canadian kids how to take care of their hair without resorting to the use of chemical relaxers, extensions and weaves.

"We build self-esteem and motivate black women to love their own hair ... many feel their hair is ugly," she said.

Recently Bashir, along with a few other kids in her community, fundraised to help support an orphan in Ghana including paying his school fees and helping with other necessities such as food and shelter. She said they fundraised the money by organizing barbeques, auctions and parties.

She credits her mother for instilling in her altruistic values at a very young age.

"My mom taught me to be selfless and to care about people," she said.

Bashir said her mother is not only her biggest role model, but also her voice of reason. Back in elementary school when teachers told her she wasn't smart enough to go to university, it was her mother who helped her to regain her confidence.

"My mom gave me the confidence," she said. "She wanted me to succeed."

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