

Aqira Lemons:

Bringing a Real-World Perspective to the OneSource WIA Youth Program and the City of Los Angeles Workforce Investment Board Youth Council



Aqira Lemons, a teen parent and youth participant from the Archdiocesan Youth Employment (AYE) WIA program, has not allowed her past with the court system to hinder her will and desire to have a better life. She is clear and focused on what she wants to do. Aqira was always eager to participate in activities that went beyond the conventional work readiness activities, such as job fairs and LA Youth at Work workshops. For this reason, her WIA case manager, Lemonde Goodloe, recommended her to attend and speak at the closing events of the California Workforce Association's annual WIA youth conference in Palm Springs in February 2004. Staff that attended the Palm Springs Conference said that she conducted herself in the best of manner, and took a leadership role. Aqira exited the WIA program and is currently in follow up. She was hired

and trained by St. Catherine's Community Center as an outreach worker in the community where she lives, South Los Angeles. Within weeks, she has moved up to a lead position, managing the office, staff, and oversight of services to the community, including distribution of food to the needy. She is also taking classes for Customer Service, and hopes to become more involved in her community as a youth advocate. To that end, Aqira was recently appointed as a youth representative for the City of Los Angeles WIB Youth Council.

AQUIRA'S STORY, IN HER OWN WORDS: "You Have to Believe to Achieve"

My name is Aqira Lemons. Before I enrolled in the Archdiocesan Youth Employment Program [a OneSource California youth program provider], I had no idea where life was going to take me. The dream that lives inside is deeper than what is visually seen. I have dreams of change and challenge. I not only want to make a difference in one person's life, but in the lives of the many unforgotten members of our society. I didn't know all of the opportunities out there available to me, but I did know that I had to pursue resources in order to obtain my dreams.

I learned a lesson early in life that nothing is impossible; some things you just have to work harder to achieve. The



Aqira and her staff (from left): Lashanay Urssery, Lakenya Rothchild, and Veronica A. Ward.

more you want the harder you'll work for it. For that reason alone, I will not give up and failure is not an option. A lot of people let go of a dream and lose the passion in life. You have to believe to achieve. I still believe in striving for excellence.

Since entering AYE, I have seen doors open up for me. I've had the chance to travel to Palm Springs for the first time for an Annual Youth Conference. Not only was this important for me, but it was also helpful to me. While at the conference I had the opportunity to meet different people and attend various worksites. I received a great deal of useful information. By the end of the three-day conference, I met someone from the Workforce Investment Board. The gentleman expressed interest in helping me become a member of the Workforce Investment Board. This will be an excellent opportunity for me to utilize my skills to prove myself and obtain a position. I feel honored to be offered the chance at a career.

I received an internship through AYE working for Catholic Charities at St. Catherine's Center. This internship resulted in permanent employment. Not only is this employment challenging to me, but it is also my opportunity for change.

The point of the story is everything in life takes time. I started off unsure and with doubts; however, with everything positive that has happened to me, I feel more confident about my future and myself.



Aquira explains how she manages the food distribution center at St. Catherine's Center.



Aquira stands proudly outside St. Catherine's Center on Vermont Street in South Los Angeles.