

Education and public service go hand in hand—each one building upon the other, naturally leading into community engagement. When community members are continuously seeking out educational opportunities, they enhance their own personal knowledge but also their ability to contribute to community knowledge on best practices and available resources. Public service is also a key component to the health and growth of a community—when people give back and do things such as donate clothing and school supplies, serve at food banks and pantries, write grant proposals for community organizations, donate to community non-profits, mentor and commit to other financial and in-kind services, the entire community benefits. The more people who do not have to experience food insecurity, the more students who receive a solid education and are able to go onto higher education and the more people who are employed all empower the community as a whole. Education and public service have a reciprocal effect on community health and growth.

I am heavily committed to education and public service, because I am one of the beneficiaries and products of both! As a youth growing up in Washington, DC, I attended public high schools and received a phenomenal foundational education and mentoring from teachers, counselors, and non-profit mentorship programs. When it came time for me to apply for college, I knew that college attendance was not an option as my family instilled in me the importance of education. As the child of an incarcerated father, a deceased mother and low-income family, I knew that education was going to be the way for me to build a better life. I knew that a college degree would open up many doors for more education, travel, public service, self-discovery, job options, etc.

Thankfully to various foundations and public service organizations in the District that are dedicated to education and raising funds towards scholarships for youth like me, I was able to secure enough scholarships to cover all four years of my undergraduate education. This is something I would not have been able to do, if it were not for people who have dedicated themselves to education, public service and community engagement. I am now a graduating senior at Elon University, with plans to obtain my Master's. At Elon, I have had the humbling privileges to learn from professors who are experts with 15 or more years of experience in their fields, conduct individual research as an Elon College Fellow and present my findings at national conferences; to study abroad and conduct service in Ghana, to serve the local Burlington and Alamance County communities (that rank 10th in the United States for highest levels of poverty), to provide community service through an NPHC sorority and through my own non-profit.

In 2010, as a junior in high school, I founded the non-profit ScholarCHIPS For Children of Incarcerated Parents. Growing up, my father was consistently in and out of prison. This affected my family and me relationally, emotionally and financially. I watched my single mother and grandmother struggle to pay the bills and make sure my brothers and I had food, school uniforms, school supplies and all the things we needed. In the same year, I was a fellow in the DC-based non-profit, LearnServe International (LSI).

LSI is a program that trains passionate high school sophomores and juniors in the DMV area about effective leadership, social change and social entrepreneurship. In the program, participants are required to identify an issue in

their community that they want to see change and then create a venture that will contribute to positive change. For me, my community issue was incarceration. I conducted research and discovered that there are millions of youth in the United States just like me, who have a parent in prison. I understood this fact also meant that many other youth in the U.S. are struggling emotionally and financially because of a parent's decisions. I knew I had to do something about it; thus, out of my desire to make positive change, ScholarCHIPS was birthed.

Today, ScholarCHIPS has awarded 17 scholars over \$44,000 in college scholarships. We also provide mentoring, a support network and an annual college life skills workshop. Our workshop includes sessions on study skills, time management, sexual health and financial planning—all tools that will help the youth be successful in college and beyond. I realize that graduating high school and getting into college is only part of the battle as these youth will often struggle to pay their tuition and maintain a decent GPA, while still dealing with issues that arise at home. Therefore, ScholarCHIPS provides a proactive, holistic approach to assisting youth with incarcerated parents.

I have successfully managed to continue my education, public service and community engagement simultaneously and cannot see myself living any other way. It is important to me to help pull others up as I climb the ladder of life. My plan is to expand our workshop into a conference that allows students who are not one of our scholarship recipients to still receive training and to make ScholarCHIPS a nationwide scholarship and mentoring program. Post graduation, I plan to become

Yasmine Arrington, Elon 2015
Samuel Halperin Submission 2015

the full-time executive director of ScholarCHIPS. Thank you for considering me for this award and for allowing me to tell my story!

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Yasmine Alexandra Arrington was born and raised in Washington, DC. She is a graduating senior at Elon University in North Carolina, with a double major in Strategic Communications and History. At Elon, Arrington is a Communications Internship Ambassador, Elon LEAD fellow, Ghana Periclean Scholar, Vice President of the Xi Omicron chapter of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Incorporated and an Elon Arts & Sciences College Fellow conducting independent research on “Resilience Among the Children of Incarcerated Parents in Washington, DC and North Carolina from 1980-Present.” As the child of an incarcerated parent, in 2010, Arrington founded the non-profit ScholarCHIPS (www.scholarchipsfund.com) under the mentorship of LearnServe International. Arrington is also a motivational speaker, poet, blogger and plus size model. She is the official District of Columbia representative in the Miss Plus USofA 2015 National Pageant.