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## Quite an inspiration

### **Aliyah Hammond was honored with the Strictly Business Inspiration Award after graduating from the JEVS Bridge to Employment program and turning her life around.**

Before Aliyah Hammond got pregnant, she didn't have a direction in life.

The 22-year-old Northeast Philadelphia resident had dropped out of high school in ninth grade and found herself couch-surfing in friends' homes for most of her later teen years. But after she heard the news, she knew she had to get her life together.

Three years later, with her 3-year-old daughter McKenzie by her side, Hammond received the Strictly Business Inspiration Award from the JEVS Bridge to Employment program. The award is given to individuals who faced extraordinary adversity and worked hard toward their futures.

"I didn't really see myself as motivation," Hammond said after the ceremony concluded. She was still surprised about being the center of attention of the estimated 600 people who attended. "It made me cry."

Hammond decided to go to YouthBuild Charter High School, where she earned her high school diploma. After crossing the stage, she enrolled in Bridge to Employment program, which gave her firsthand experience working at Einstein Medical Center Emergency Room in Elkins Park.

"I was born at Einstein and my daughter was born at Einstein," she said. "It's perfect."

The program teaches students to get careers in patient services, and emphasizes skills like insurance, teamwork and public speaking. Students receive three months of classroom time and six months of support employment.

"It taught me things you could take advantage of even outside of work," she said. "I use them every day without even noticing. I'm going to teach my daughter all of this stuff, too. I have to keep going so she knows."

She was able to transition to full-time employment at Einstein, where she works at the front desk. She also has plans to become a practical nurse in the future.

“I’m the first person they see when they get there and the last person they see when they leave,” she said.

Hammond was able to become a leader of her cohort and received the highest-rated evaluation in her cohort on the work skills maturity assessment.

“You have to have role models that emerge in the cohorts and hope the others follow suit,” said Alia Sutton-Bey, a program instructor at Bridge to Employment. “She was really an inspiration to a lot of the students.”

Hammond’s mother, Lakesha Rozier, watched her daughter turn her life around firsthand.

“Today was awesome,” she said. “I’ve been telling everybody.”