This year has been a whirlwind of accomplishments and life-changing experiences for 20-year-old Jonathan Muñoz, a senior at Good Shepherd’s South Brooklyn Community High School (SBCHS) in Red Hook, Brooklyn. SBCHS provides a full-day, year-round academic program in a highly personalized school environment for students who are significantly off-track for graduation.

After winning a spot in the Global Citizen Scholars program, Jonathan was one of six people in that program to be selected for a 10-day experiential trip to South Africa. This was his first time travelling outside of America, and on a plane. In October, Jonathan also co-hosted our annual Fall Benefit at Frederick P. Rose Hall, home of Jazz at Lincoln Center.

This young scholar has warmed many hearts with his genuine charisma and audacious dreams. With plans to ultimately earn his PhD, Jonathan’s indomitable focus is on completing college and becoming a huge figure in this world.

Growing Up Jonathan

My childhood was rough. I saw a lot of stuff that a child shouldn’t see, but at the end of the day I always had school. My mom didn’t make me more outspoken. It gave me the right tools I needed to make change. I want to be a huge figure.

The Faith of a Mustard Seed

I got involved with Good Shepherd Services after a string of failures in school. I wanted to get a diploma like everyone else, so I didn’t give up on finding the right school. Good Shepherd’s SBCHS was my third high school and it actually turned out to be a success. Prior to that, when I was a child, at age 7, I was in Good Shepherd’s family counseling with my mom. That was my very first introduction to Good Shepherd.

A Path To Greater Things

Right now, my time is dedicated to college applications and trying to get in to a great school. I want to make sure I can grasp any opportunity in front of me. I’m looking into studying sociology and global affairs. I want to do something global, worldwide, traveling, where I can also reach people and make change. I want to be a huge figure.

A Powerful Voice for Teens

It’s important to me that people know that the way I think now, I’ve always thought this way. Until now, I’ve never had the platform to actually say it. I believe a lot of teenagers have bright ideas and are very creative and have a lot to say. They just don’t have the platform to say it. It’s an honor, to me, to get this kind of platform and represent them and say what’s on my mind. Everything I say is genuine and it comes from the heart. It’s easy for me because I’m talking about my life. Going to Africa, it changed me for the better but it didn’t change me as a whole — as a person. All of these accomplishments have made me more outspoken to give me the right tools needed to further myself in life and make a bridge for others.

We have celebrated the successes of many students in our programs who have risen above their circumstances to be standouts in school. After attending Good Shepherd’s Groundwork for Success (GWS) program, 21-year-old alumna Lizetta Alexander has become a young force with fierce ambition — and she’s positioning herself for a prominent place in her future career. GWS is a four-year program that prepares high school students in East New York for success in high school and college.

Lizetta, a senior at Cornell University where she is a Pre-Med major with a minor in Global Health, recently travelled to Zambia, Africa for a field experience to research climate change. While there, Lizetta shadowed doctors at the University Teaching Hospital of Zambia and that experience helped solidify her next steps in academia. As she prepares for graduation in May 2018, she shares some of her life experiences, dreams, and goals.

I Am Lizetta

I’m a Brooklynite, born and raised. I’m the youngest of three children and both my mom and dad are immigrants who were raised in the Caribbean before migrating to New York. Education has always been important in my family. My 29-year-old brother went to college and both my 34-year-old sister and mom have Masters Degrees.

Ive League Material

The bar for education has been set high in my family, but the school I attended in Brownsville was rough. I’m thankful for Good Shepherd Services and their impact in my life.

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My success coaches like Miss Heather and Miss Kim, pushed me to apply to Cornell University when I didn’t believe I was Ivy League material at the time. I didn’t think I would get accepted, but my coaches seemed confident that I was a strong applicant. My high school wasn’t really pushing kids that hard, so I do thank them a lot for that. Also GWS provided a lot of services such as SAT Prep, tutoring, and college tours. I also earned a $5000 scholarship to attend Cornell. I’m a beneficiary of Good Shepherd’s resources, time and effort. I know how much they really care for their kids and their students.

A Well-Charted Future

Although I’m Pre-Med, I will not be pursuing medical school right now. Before going to Zambia, I kind of already knew that a hospital setting was not where I wanted to work. Instead, I’m looking into a graduate school to get my Masters in Public Health — my MPH. Before I even apply to grad school I want to work and gain that experience to make sure this is actually what I want to do in life. So, I’m looking into a program at the Center for Disease Control (CDC) to become a Public Health Associate where they train you in public health related subjects like epidemiology and tracking infectious diseases. They also station you anywhere in the country for two years. That is the position I’m most interested in, but I’m also looking at NGOs and companies that do healthcare consulting.