

## Edison student Jasmine Caldwell “Beat the Odds”

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Jasmine “Jazz” Caldwell, a senior at Edison High School, was among four teens recognized by Children’s Defense Fund (CDF)-Minnesota for succeeding in school and life after overcoming extreme adversity. Also selected as award winners were Brian Anderson of South St. Paul High School, Amanda Kelley of Johnson Senior High School and Kristal Vang of Harding High School in St. Paul. The four students were chosen from among almost one hundred applicants across the Twin Cities and received \$4,000 scholarship awards.

Caldwell was placed in a foster home when she was seven-years-old following her father’s arrest for the rape of her older sister. A year later, she was reunited with her mother and sister, but their family faced poverty without her father’s income. “That the man I called ‘Daddy’ was accused of child molestation sickened me,” she said. When friends asked why her father was in prison, Caldwell avoided the truth, but as she wrote her “Beat the Odds” Award application essay, she felt she could share her family’s secret. After she read her essay to her mother and sister, they realized that the secret they once hid no longer brought them shame.

Caldwell’s grandmother encouraged her to go after her dreams and pursue education. She is a model student, a three-sport athlete, an award-winning cosmetology student and a participant in Admission Possible. She wants to go to an historically Black college to study math and physical education. “Life is what you make it,” said Caldwell. “Here’s my chance and I’m taking control of my life.”

“These four Beat the Odds honorees have overcome situations that most of us have never faced,” said CDF-Minnesota Director Jim Koppel. “Poverty, homelessness, illness, lack of health care, violence and loss of loved ones are experiences that no child should endure. They have faced these hardships and not only survived, they have become leaders. Yet, while we celebrate their success, we must rededicate ourselves to ensuring that Minnesota’s children aren’t burdened with challenges. No child should have to overcome such extreme adversity. The honorees give us the unique opportunity to envision what we can do so that no child has to beat odds, so that all children are given the supports they need and deserve to grow up healthy and happy. That’s the lesson we must take away.”