

## Celebration of Dreams: Annual event honors foster graduates

Forty-six young men and women from the foster care system who completed high school were honored during the sixth-annual Celebration of Dreams June 17 at the Montgomery Inn Banquet Center.

Lee Butler, retired HCJFS Residential Treatment supervisor, served as emcee. County Commissioner Todd Portune presented certificates to graduates, who cheered each other as their names were called.

Graduate Antwan Oden gave a moving speech about his life and upcoming plans. Lindsey Streaker, a 2002 graduate, encouraged this year's class to work toward their goals and follow their dreams.



**Antwan Oden**  
speaks about his  
life

Julius Jackson, the final graduate, asked his caseworker and two other professionals in his life to stand, so he could thank them personally for their help in getting to this point in his life. The crowd loved it.

HCJFS employees helped make this a special night for the graduates by donating \$1,700 and items for duffel bags that were given to graduates. The money paid for remaining items needed for duffel bags as well as school fees, books, etc.

Among the volunteers were: Laurie Petrie, Kamala Renick, Erin Eckert, Regina Eckert, Mark Eling, Judy Stadler, Sandi Webster, Stacey Sutton, Heather Stoess, Terri Doughman, Sheila Bass, Brenda Padgett, Terri Ogunleye, Linda King, Kathy Tiettmeyer and Merry Paul.



**Lindsey Streaker, a 2002 graduate, offers words of encouragement to the class.**  
*Scroll down for a full text of her comments.*



***Please scroll down for more photos***

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# A Celebration of Dreams 2004



# Celebration of Dreams

## Lindsey Straeker's comments

When I heard that I was invited here to speak this evening and join everyone in celebrating dreams, I couldn't help but think about when I graduated. I remember that day so well, I was really excited and yet I'll never forget that feeling that came over me when I finally walked up to accept my diploma, the ticket to what laid ahead for me. So many thoughts ran through my head and feelings through my heart. Of course there was that great feeling of relief, I mean; I was finished with my high school career. So many people wait and wait for that day, so I was surprised to find that along with the relief came an overwhelming sadness and fear of what was next.

Now I stand here before you today having accomplished all of the things that I had doubted ever doing in my life. When I think back on all the memories of my life I like to try and remember times when I was most happy, because like anyone, there will always be those memories that remain etched in your mind and forever engraved in your heart. My childhood was something that I can most definitely say painted a very vivid picture. Everyone has both good and bad childhood memories, but some of us are more unfortunate than others. I guess you can say I wasn't dealt the best hand. The past can't be erased, and unfortunately it can't be forgotten either, but I realize that life is what you make it.

So when I reflect on everything now, there is nothing that I would take back or change, because even through I did go through some very difficult things, from all my experiences, I feel I have learned so much as a person, and become a strong, independent young woman along the way. It may sound silly, but the hard times in life are truly what make people wise. When you actually experience something like foster care first hand you awake to the realization of how the world is, but I think the one thing that people like you or I can hold onto is the fact that it could be worse, and the future still holds so many things.

I'm not here to make you dwell on the past, or to fear the future. My hopes are that just a few simple words just might inspire you to reach the stars, and never doubt yourself in any pursuits of life. If we were all turned inside out, we would look the same, but the wonderful part about every individual is our own unique thoughts and views of life. I know sometimes it's hard to figure out who you really are if you haven't become in touch with that person. Learn to love yourself despite whatever flaws you think that you have. I believe that's the first step to greatness. Hold on to all of your hopes, pursue all of your goals, and believe in yourself. You may have heard that so many times, and never really given it much thought, but honestly, I can say that sometimes a little believing goes a long way.

I want to say thank you to all of the people that held my hand and helped me find my way as they have with you.

Now I leave you with one final thought. I consider life like a book. You have completed the first chapter, and now is the time to make the best of the second.

Congratulations!

# Celebration of Dreams

## Antwan Oden's comments

When my caseworker first told me about the Celebration of Dreams and asked me to do a speech, I said no. But a few days went past and those three words – Celebration of Dreams – kept going through my mind and I thought: “I have a dream to celebrate.” I just graduated from high school. The reason graduating is a dream come true for me is because out of my foster and biological immediate families, I am the first to graduate. My mother, father, older brothers or sister weren't able to finish high school due to unfortunate situations that occurred.

Graduating was also a dream come true for me because some people said I couldn't do it and I was just another statistic.

...Statistics show that one in every three African-American males are in, or have been in, some type of correctional facility, one out of every five before the age 18. I'm only 17. I have my own apartment, and I will be majoring in business management at Cincinnati State the late fall term. I want to say that I appreciate everyone here tonight because you take time away from your families, especially your child(ren), to make sure that someone else's child(ren) is/are take care of and I respect and appreciate that very much. Last thing I have left to say is everything happens for a reason, so don't let one unfortunate incident affect the rest of your life. I have had plenty of chances to make excuses and say that foster care was my downfall, but instead it made me stronger, smarter, and more determined to succeed.