



Youth Award Winner J'Koreyia Lawson: 'I Love My Community'

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By Hannah Weinberg-Kinsey

At the young age of 12, J'Koreyia Lawson become involved with [City on a Hill](#), a Milwaukee nonprofit engaged in responding to the symptoms of poverty through education, health services and more. Lawson grew up in the city neighborhood around City on a Hill and was surprised when she was asked to volunteer at the health clinic.



“On my first Saturday volunteering, I was thinking, “Are you sure you want me to come?” Lawson remembers. “Then I had the feeling that **no one at the health clinic was unneeded. Everyone there was considered equal.** The relationships developed. I started to know the clients by name ... I had always been a receiver and now I actually had the chance to give back in a way, even if it was the littlest thing like passing out coffee and sugar.”

J'Koreyia is the winner of the 2016 [Inspire by Example Youth Award](#) given by the Nonprofit Center of Milwaukee.

The combination of Lawson's unique and inherent inner strengths compounded with the transformation from receiver to giver empower Lawson to engage in her community in profound ways today as seventeen year old. Since that first Saturday at the health clinic, Lawson has been a **leader on City on a Hill's youth community service team**, engaging in tasks like mowing lawns and cleaning up litter. She has gone door to door in the neighborhood to identify needs of families and connect them with resources and services. She participates in peer education events that spark conversations on risks of alcohol, drugs, and gangs.

Most notably, Lawson had the bravery and initiative to **organize a Racial Residue workshop at her own high school**, Milwaukee Academy of Science. Racial Residue workshops are part of the education outreach at City on a Hill. The workshops work from the assumption that our country's history of slavery and Jim Crow laws leave a residue of racism, sometimes thin sometimes thick. It highlights the realities of a layered but real racism that our country faces today.

“We did the Racial Residue workshop at City on a Hill and I thought we need this at my school,” Lawson explained. She met with her principal and guidance counselor and three weeks later successfully led a workshop for her entire school, freshman to seniors. “After we had the workshop, people came to the guidance counselor and talked to her about the things I said, like how silence is violence and how we often blame people for things we can't control and how we are angry about some things. I feel like if I wouldn't have brought it to the school they wouldn't have said anything and it would have been unknown.”

Lawson's initiative to bring the workshop to her peers gave them a magnifying glass to examine their own lives as students of color in Milwaukee and examine both prejudices they experienced and their

own internalized racism. She empowered her peers with critical thinking.

One judge who decided this year's Inspire by Example Youth Award winner this year remarked, "I wish we could clone J'Koreyia! What an absolute success story, role model, and difference-maker she has grown into at such a young age!"

Lawson now has inner drive to give back. "Even though I used to be in the situation where I was the receiver, now that I'm able to give, I actually want to give back to my community," she says. Lawson doesn't need to be convinced to give up her Saturday to service. Instead she thinks, "When do you need me there? What time and what do you want me to wear? Should I wear flats or tennis shoes? Are we going to walk around the neighborhood today? **I love the things we do at City on a Hill. I love interacting with people. I love my community.**"

Join us in honoring all of the Inspire By Example award recipients at the 34th Annual Volunteer Celebration April 7, 2016, 11:30 AM - 01:00 PM CT at the Italian Community Center, 631 E. Chicago Street. Milwaukee, WI 53202. [Click here to register online.](#)



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