

JANUARY STUDENT OF THE MONTH



Name: Kamilah Gordon

School: Randolph Technical HS

Nominated By: Chef Michael Bell - Culinary Arts Teacher

How do we know that we are here, on this earth, for a purpose? We've all asked ourselves that question, and for many the answer is elusive. For many it takes years, lifetimes, to find that purpose. Some even struggle with believing they have a purpose at all. If we're lucky, like Kamilah Gordon, there will be a very specific flashpoint that proves, once and for all, that we're here for a purpose.

As you read the rest of Kamilah's story, you might decide that lucky is not the correct term. After all, how could a high school senior, striving for academic success while experiencing housing insecurity after escaping an abusive household be considered lucky? Well, Kamilah herself used that term - a sign of the battle-hardened maturity that imbues her every word. Just last year, while recovering in a hospital bed after a very serious bout of hopelessness, she experienced a flashpoint that changed her mindset and her course forever.

Kamilah was adopted at the age of five and went from one abusive home to another. For 18 years, growing up was not easy. Last year, Kamilah was lucky enough to get kicked out of her house. "They mentally abused me since I was 5 years old," Kamilah said. "I know it doesn't seem like a good thing, but in hindsight, I'm glad to get out of there. I knew I had to get out of that situation." Escaping the abuse though, was only the first of many hurdles to come. The pressure to maintain her grades while finding a place to live and learning to survive on her own began to mount. In fact it became so much that Kamilah almost gave up. "I was hopeless and depressed -- I ended up in the hospital where nobody visited me except my therapist," said Kamilah. "That hospital stay changed everything for me. I realized that I'd been through all this and survived so I must be here for a reason. I decided in that bed that I would remember my past and change my future."

Kamilah has maintained a high GPA this year, and excelled in Culinary Arts class while living in a youth home for women in Philadelphia. She has decided to pursue her passion for culinary arts, nurtured by her nominator and teacher Chef Bell, at either the Culinary Institute of America or the Institute of Culinary Education after she graduates. She intends to become a chef and eventually a restaurateur.

It takes a special person to weather those storms and still maintain that confidence. It takes a powerhouse to experience and all that she has and still consider herself lucky. We had the privilege of chatting with Kamilah after she was selected as Student of the Month. Here's more of what she had to say:

1. **What does being named Student of the Month mean to you?** It feels like a huge accomplishment - I hope I can be a role model for other people in my situation. I'm an 18 year old student who is forced to live and learn everything independently. I've had to learn how to survive on my own and still succeed. Giving up was never an option for me. I hope I can be an example that you can do anything and overcome anything if you believe you can. I've overcome so much so this is a huge blessing.
2. **Explain your relationship to Mr. Bell, your nominator?** Since I started high school I've been interested in culinary arts. I couldn't have asked for a better teacher because not only is he a great chef, he's a good person. He teaches us that food is about family - his class became the family that I didn't have.

"We have a lot in common," said Chef Bell. "We were both adopted young, and we both had role model teachers growing up. So the ideas of family take on a deeper meaning for us. We don't take that for granted."

3. **What is one thing you'd like to share about yourself that most people don't know about you?** Baking is my favorite culinary art. "She has a very keen eye for the art of cooking." said Chef Bell.
4. **What do you enjoy most when you are not at school?** I really enjoy spending time keeping myself motivated and mentally strong. I like reading motivational books and inspirational stories. Lots of self-talk and "I AM" affirmations. I want to be able to use my experience to uplift and empower others.
5. **What is the best thing about attending school at Randolph?** My culinary arts family, and that class itself. I love going to class and doing the work -- it's therapeutic for me. Also, the mental health professionals at Randolph are incredible. They've helped me so much and I appreciate it.



Congratulations on your Senior of the Month honors Kamilah!

**If you are a student or know a student experiencing homelessness, please visit the District's [resource website for children or youth experiencing homelessness](#).*