

## **Shnieka Johnson**

### *The E.L.I. Program*

The Emerging Leaders Institute definitely has been a learning experience for me over the past few months. I did not know what to expect coming into the program or what was expected of myself. I feel that E.L.I. has aided me in understanding leadership skills and developing a sense of self.

### *Recent Happenings*

One activity that stands out in my mind is the ropes course. The last session of the class was a group challenge that was more strenuous than others. I was placed in a group with people that the majority, I have not been placed to complete a task with all semester. I had to work with them on the final day. We were give two tasks to complete as a team. The first task was unorganized, the group was not focused and everyone wanted to be their own leader. After commentary from the event coordinator we went on to the next event. This time we stepped away from the task at hand and looked at the entire picture. We came up with a strategy together; I was still struggling with my issues of trust in the group. Though we completed both tasks successfully, this was a challenge for me. I had to leave my comfortable domain and work with others outside of my designated mentor group. It was still hard for me to open up and trust them.

### *Peer Impact*

This and the other activities made me look at myself in a different light than I had before. The critical eye that I saw others through was looking at a reflection of myself. I have

gradually changed over the past few months due to lessons learned in sessions like "Appreciating Diversity" and "Conflict Management" as well as the ropes course. I've learned that leadership is built on listening and learning from others. The leader is not always the person that stands out, talks loud and tells everyone else what to do. A leader is someone who is dependable, passionate and inspiring. By listening to my peers and working with them on tasks I've realized that I do have leadership qualities. Though I am not as dominant as others with my tactics. My personal definition of a leader is someone leads others to lead and supports them in doing so. I learned this during the planning of our class group project at the Ronald McDonald House. I feel that during the planning of this project I was able to use my passion in order to lead others to become interested in the organization and start other projects linking to that. I have found that there is no recorded definition of a leader and that leadership is not taught. Leadership is a quality that consists of traits like humor, charisma or intelligence. Every leader has a different combination of traits and therefore is indescribable and cannot be molded. This class does not teach you to be a leader, but to be yourself.

### *Personal Change*

I have seen many changes in my character since beginning the E.L.I. Class. For starters, I didn't think that I could sit still that long and actually enjoy my surroundings. The class was enjoyable and introduced me to many people I probably would not have encountered if not through the E.L.I. Class. I have met many amazing students and faculty I would not have looked at or connected with until now. I have become a more open and personable individual because of those around me. I am very appreciative of the experience I was

given in the Class. from the caring teachers, mentors and concerned peers in the group. I have gone through several personal changes outside of Class and would not have made it through without their help. It seems that those you think will not care at all are often those who give you a shoulder to lean on. I plan on continuing friendships with those in the class and possibly working with them on projects to come. I was placed with an amazing group of people that overlooked flaws and tried very hard to focus on the task at hand. I am very thankful for those I have bonded with if even for a day. I have changed so much over this short amount of time. I am stronger, more outgoing and more open. I feel that I have matured and am able to accept the things that were once awkward to me. I've learned to appreciate differences and accept change.