

Houston *Beat the Odds* 2010 Award Recipients

Antonio De Jesus Palacios was born with Spina Bifida and suffers from resulting physical abnormalities and an inability to control key bodily functions. Antonio says “what was a birth defect has become a secret” and something he struggles to hide from his peers. Antonio’s perseverance and the strong support of his mother have allowed him to overcome physical and social challenges. Today, Antonio is very active in the National Honor Society, Science National Honor Society, and Peer Assistance and Leadership Club at Eisenhower High School. Antonio plans to become a physician so that he can assist others with Spina Bifida.

Aisha Fahradova grew up in Azerbaijan living in poverty, and sometimes eating only one meal a day. She was a victim of attempted rape when she was six years old and endured over 12 years of physical and verbal abuse by her stepfather. Always at the top of her class, both in her native country and now in the United States, Aisha remains focused on succeeding. Many of her teachers refer to her as the “perfect student” and are impressed with her ability to sustain unwavering perseverance. Aisha is graduating from Lee High School, ranked fourth out of 473, and is determined to begin her college education this fall.

Shamso Hussein experienced a world turned upside down when her parents were forced to flee their homeland of Somalia. Taking refuge in Yemen, the family was unable to get proper medical care for her mother and made the difficult decision to move again as refugees to the United States. Shamso is determined to become the first in her family to attend college. She is completing her studies at Liberty High School a semester early and plans to study Business at the University of Houston.

Kateri Perez was diagnosed with juvenile Arthritis Dermatomyositis at the age of five. For eight years she was hospitalized every weekend in order to receive a treatment that could potentially stop the progression of her illness. While managing her painful condition, other medical issues plagued her family, including the severely premature birth of her baby sister. In spite of daily visits to the hospital to see her sister, as well as her own weekend treatments, she never fell behind in school. She is ranked sixth out of 538 at DeKaney High School and plans to major in Psychology at the University of Houston.

Patricia Zamora masks her tragic home life with a beautiful smile. She has overcome many years of sexual abuse and is determined not to let her history stand in the way of academic success. She says, “[my responsibility] is to be the best I can be, to forget about the past because it does not determine what I am or will be”. Patricia is an officer in the National Honor Society at Eisenhower High School and graduating at the top of her class. She is counting on her genuine love of learning to help her become a Pediatric Oncologist.

Esther Friedman Blonstein Scholarship Award

Kaileah Seedorf has endured a life without support or stability. At the age of two, Child Protective Services removed her from the care of her mother due to her mother’s drug usage. Once reunited with her mother, Kaileah spent her childhood moving constantly. When Kaileah’s mother was ultimately arrested, Kaileah lived with her alcoholic, violent grandmother who disapproved of Kaileah’s mixed race. Kaileah now temporarily lives at her friend’s home. She has refused to allow the instability in her life prevent her from being successful at school. Kaileah passed the College Board Advancement Placement United States History Exam, participates in UIL academic competitions and National Honor Society. Kaileah is graduating from Dayton High School and plans to attend Texas A&M University to major in Biomedical Science.