

Children's Defense Fund
Beat the Odds®
PROGRAM OVERVIEW



When **Courtney** was five years old, her father was killed. Alone, afraid and desperate, her newly widowed mother turned to drugs. By Courtney's 14th birthday, her mother had twice been to jail, leaving Courtney to become a ward of the state.

She lived in shelters, foster-care and group homes, and attended five different high schools in less than two years. Courtney was forced to take care of herself without support from her family or the community around her.

Despite tremendous personal hardship, Courtney remained active in her community and volunteered much of her time at homeless shelters.

She also graduated from Houston's High School for Health Professions with over a 4.0 GPA.

In 1999, Courtney was recognized for her personal and academic achievements with a **Beat the Odds** award. The scholarship enabled her to attend Grinnell College where she graduated with a dual pre-Med and English degree.

Courtney joined the Peace Corps after college and today works to provide support for refugee children and families with Catholic Charities.

Children's Defense Fund (CDF) created the **Beat the Odds** program in 1990 to affirm the personal success of youth struggling to overcome adversity. Despite the significant challenges they face, **Beat the Odds** recipients excel in school, give back to their communities, and inspire others in need of encouragement.

Hundreds of Beat the Odds award recipients walk the halls of leadership and service in their universities and communities. They inspire others who face similar odds. Their experiences inform efforts to improve life for all children.

Since 1999, CDF Texas has celebrated the remarkable lives of five extraordinary high school students and the families, friends, teachers, and counselors who helped them succeed each year with an annual scholarship awards program.

In addition to national recognition and media attention, winners receive a college scholarship, gifts donated by the community, and opportunities for leadership training at the CDF Alex Haley Farm.

The **Beat the Odds** dinner raises awareness about the challenges facing youth and provides critical funding support for the ongoing local efforts of Children's Defense Fund.

As part of the ceremony, CDF president and founder **Marian Wright Edelman** presents a **Champion of Children** award to an outstanding individual(s) demonstrating a commitment to improving the lives of children. Previous honorees include Mayor Bill White, former Harris County Judge Robert Eckels, former Mayor Bob and Elyse Lanier, Lan and Adele Bentsen, and Charles Butt and HEB.

"No one else recognized how hard I had to work to accomplish even small successes. Having someone believe in me and care about me made all the difference."

-- Moises (awarded in 2000)

For inquiries or to become a program sponsor
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