



**Children's Defense Fund**  
**BEAT THE ODDS<sup>®</sup>**

*The Children's Defense Fund – Ohio*

Celebrating Five Extraordinary Young People



July 23, 2012  
Duke Energy Convention Center  
Cincinnati, Ohio  
7:30 PM

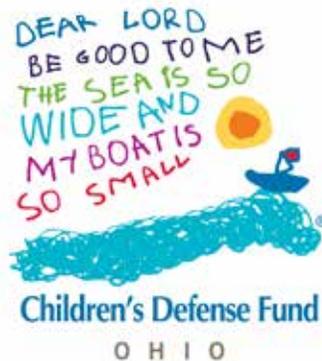


## CHILDREN'S DEFENSE FUND MISSION STATEMENT

The Children's Defense Fund Leave No Child Behind® mission is to ensure every child a *Healthy Start, a Head Start, a Fair Start, a Safe Start and a Moral Start* in life and successful passage to adulthood with the help of caring families and communities.

CDF provides a strong, effective and independent voice for all the children of America who cannot vote, lobby or speak for themselves. We pay particular attention to the needs of poor and minority children and those with disabilities. CDF educates the nation about the needs of children and encourages preventive investments before they get sick, drop out of school, get into trouble or suffer family breakdown.

CDF began in 1973 and is a private, nonprofit organization supported by foundation and corporate grants and individual donations. The Children's Defense Fund – Ohio office was founded in 1981.



To lend your support or for more information, contact:

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## WELCOME TO THE OHIO BEAT THE ODDS PROGRAM!

The Children's Defense Fund-Ohio welcomes you to the first annual Beat the Odds awards celebration. Tonight, we honor five Ohio high school students who have demonstrated academic excellence and given back to their communities while overcoming tremendous adversity. These incredible young people are writing another chapter in the history of struggle, sacrifice and success in America. Their personal stories of beating the odds are part of a larger story and inspire us to act now to change the odds for young people everywhere.

In celebrating their achievements tonight, we remember those who have come before them to beat the odds and change the odds for others. And so we will also recognize five special Ohio institutions and individuals for breaking down barriers and helping advance opportunity for countless people.

Highlighting youth and community empowerment, we are honored to have Ohio's first Beat the Odds celebration in conjunction with our national conference. Tonight you will witness what a youth can achieve and overcome with the support of a committed individual and what one committed individual can do to change our community. Together, we can create a better world for all of us.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Marian Wright Edelman".

Marian Wright Edelman  
Children's Defense Fund  
Founder and President

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Renuka Mayadev".

Renuka Mayadev  
Children's Defense Fund-Ohio  
Executive Director



## THE EVENING'S PRESENTATION

### Welcome

Renuka Mayadev, Children's Defense Fund – Ohio

### Mistress Of Ceremonies

Jurnee Smollett-Bell, Actress | Board Member - Children's Defense Fund

Malaak Compton-Rock, Founder – The Angelrock Project | Board Member – Children's Defense Fund

### Beat The Odds Honorees

Joshua Jenkins, Lakewood High School, Cuyahoga County

De'Von Jennings, Beechcroft High School, Franklin County

Indyasia Johnson, Gamble Montessori High School, Hamilton County

Amber Rohrer, Alliance High School, Stark County

Clara Smith, Jane Addams Business Careers, Cuyahoga County

### Beat The Odds Presenters

William Willis, Jr., Cleveland Browns Family

Clem Willis, Cleveland Browns Family

Brian Washington, Cleveland Browns Family

Steve Frohwerk, Cleveland Indians

Judge Nathaniel R. Jones, United States Court of Appeals, Sixth Circuit – Retired

Justice Yvette McGee Brown, Supreme Court of Ohio

John E. Pepper, Jr., National Underground Railroad Freedom Center



**Keynote Presentation**

Justice Yvette McGee Brown, Supreme Court of Ohio

**Children's Defense Fund – A Special Message**

Marian Wright Edelman, Founder and President

**Musical Entertainment**

Eli Wilson, Pianist

**Cincinnati Freedom Schools Scholars and Servant Leader Interns**

National Underground Railroad Museum Freedom Center  
Bethel Baptist Church  
Christ Emmanuel Christian Fellowship  
Gray Road Church of Christ



# Children's Defense Fund **BEAT THE ODDS**<sup>®</sup>

Too often we hear about teens getting into trouble, dropping out of school, getting involved with drugs, crime and gangs or becoming parents too soon. Yet thousands of young people overcome tremendous obstacles everyday. For almost 40 years, the Children's Defense Fund (CDF) has educated the nation about the needs of children.

Each year, CDF takes time to honor inspiring high school students through our *Beat the Odds* scholarship program held in seven locations across the country. We honor outstanding high school students who have overcome tremendous adversity, demonstrated academic excellence, and given back to their communities. Started in 1990, the program identifies and rewards young people who have experienced significant hardship in their lives and supports and trains them to become future leaders in adulthood. These remarkable young people are a true inspiration.

Each student will receive a \$5,000 college scholarship, a laptop computer and a welcome into CDF's youth leadership development ladder, which includes advocacy and leadership training and internship opportunities.

The first CDF *Beat the Odds* event was held in Los Angeles, CA, over twenty years ago. We now celebrate resilient young people in Los Angeles, Minneapolis-St. Paul, Houston, Dallas, New York City, New Orleans and Washington, D.C. We have recognized and supported nearly 700 young people who have overcome family breakdown, homelessness, drugs, parental incarceration, violence, neglect and abuse, and still excelled in school and reached out to serve others. They are now doctors and lawyers and teachers and Peace Corps volunteers and responsible parents and citizens. They are living proof that *no one should ever give up on a child*.

CDF holds high-profile awards events to send a clear signal that someone does care and understand what it takes for students to stay in school and succeed while coping with adversity in their lives. Not only do these awards celebrate scholarship recipients, they demonstrate that behind each successful child is at least one caring adult. In addition, they are meant to inspire community leaders and citizens who want to help children struggling to overcome adversity.





## BEAT THE ODDS SELECTION COMMITTEE

We want to thank our 2012 Beat the Odds Selection Committee for the time that they have given selecting our Beat the Odds scholarship winners. Their efforts are very much appreciated, and we hope that their involvement has given them insight into the mission of the Children's Defense Fund and what a Beat the Odds event can mean to an honoree.

**Terry Butler**  
Cuyahoga Community College

**Judge Algenon Marbley**  
United States District Judge

**Peggy Cordray**  
Capital University Law School Professor

**Somers Martin**  
Columbus Chamber of Commerce

**Marcia Egbert**  
The Gund Foundation

**Rafi Rodriguez**  
Ohio Hispanic Chamber of Commerce

**John Gilligan**  
Ice Miller LLP

**Frances Strickland**  
Former First Lady of the State of Ohio

**Greg Gorospe**  
Jones Day LLC

**Alicia Szempruch**  
The Columbus Foundation

**Adriennie Hatten**  
Sisters of Charity Cleveland

**Linda Thompson**  
Former Executive Director of the  
Ohio State Bar Association

**Margaret Hulbert**  
United Way of Greater Cincinnati

**Ernest Wilkerson**  
Wilkerson & Associates, LPA

**Greg Landsman**  
The Strive Partnership



# Children's Defense Fund

## BEAT THE ODDS®



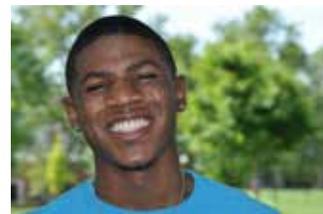
**Joshua Jenkins**  
Lakewood High School, Cuyahoga County

When Joshua was in sixth grade, his mother broke her leg and was unable to return to work. His drug and alcohol addicted father was in and out of jail and never played a supportive role in his life. They were evicted from their home and moved between shelters and homes for several years. They finally gained some stable footing in Lakewood, Ohio until October of 2010, when Joshua's father called to tell him that his mother had passed away from a sudden heart attack. Joshua and his brothers were then adrift without a reliable adult in their lives. He has made it his mission to get the best possible education and has maintained a part time job to help raise his two brothers. Joshua is attending Kent State University in the fall, where he plans on majoring in Sports Administration.

***“Throughout my life many challenges have come before me.  
None of them have been too hard to handle.”***

**De'Von Jennings**  
Beechcroft High School, Franklin County

De'Von's mother passed away when he was three and for years he lived in his father's abusive home. His teenage years were spent in foster care, shuffling from home to home. Throughout his multiple placements, he has seen the foster system fail a majority of his foster siblings. He has witnessed them turn to drugs and alcohol, quit school, and go to jail. Despite the instability, De'Von has maintained a GPA over 3.5 and has earned 8 varsity letters. He also spends his time tutoring middle school students and has volunteered for the Healthy Neighborhood/Healthy Families program. His long-term goal is to earn a master's degree in civil engineering.



***“Over the years, I have seen the path that my foster brothers chose to go down which ultimately led to dropping out, drugs or even death. I have always sought a better path – that of higher education.”***



**Indyasia Johnson**  
Gamble Montessori High School, Hamilton County

Indyasia has experienced post-traumatic stress disorder, the absence of her father, and the odds stacked against an African American female from West End Cincinnati raised by a single mother. She has been held at gunpoint while her father was nearly beaten to death. In addition, her mother has been unemployed for three years and her father is serving a 12 year prison sentence. She has seven younger siblings. Since she turned 15 years old, Indyasia has had a job at Kings Island every summer and has picked up second jobs at Popeye's and Applebee's. Despite adversity, she always has a smile on her face, has maintained a 4.0 GPA, and volunteers at the Ronald McDonald house and Krohn Conservatory. She plans on attending college and then medical school so that she may become a pediatrician and start a non-profit child abuse prevention organization.

***“The obstacles that I faced have motivated me even more to accomplish my goals”***



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**Amber Rohrer**  
**Alliance High School, Stark County**

Amber grew up in a single parent household. Her childhood was chaotic, unstable and filled with abuse. When she was young, her father was deemed unfit and was forced to give up his parental rights. Her mother then married a man who claimed to be religious, but was physically abusive. In middle school, her stepfather was sent to jail for domestic violence.

Amber's mother turned to prostitution to pay the bills, and filled the home with drugs, alcohol, and strange men. Amber's family was evicted and moved several times, staying in homeless shelters and with family friends. Amber began to rebel by skipping school and making bad choices. But a family stealing trip to Walmart orchestrated by her mother led Amber back onto the right track. Amber dedicated herself to school and community service. She now lives in a positive environment with school friends. Amber's struggle with her mother has made her realize "that dysfunction is not an excuse to live life in a negative way and is never an excuse to misuse others or break the law." Amber currently has a 3.97 GPA, participates in Toys for Tots, volunteers for the humane society and the Special Olympics, and is a member of the National Honor Society. She plans to earn a master's degree in psychology and become a licensed alcohol and drug counselor.

***"I must take responsibility for my own actions because each choice is my own."***

**Clara Smith**  
**Jane Addams Business Careers, Cuyahoga County**



Clara first came in contact with the foster care system when she was three years old. Her father was an abusive alcoholic and drug addict. Her mother was found incompetent to raise her children. After a year, her parents regained custody. Her father was sober for a time, but then became verbally and physically abusive towards her mother and siblings. After a while, Clara and her sisters were removed from the home again and then returned. While in high school, her father fell ill, and she became responsible for many of the household duties. During this time, she became close to her father and in November of 2010 she went to visit him in the hospital when he told her that he was sorry and he was proud of her. He died later that night. She has come to understand the importance of education and is excited about her future and college. She currently has a 3.95 GPA, is involved in the Key Club and the National Honor Society. She is planning to attend Kent State University and complete their pre-law program. She plans to be a lawyer.

***"What is visible on my surface does not define me as a person. My experiences do."***



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At Children's Defense Fund's Haley Farm (Clinton, TN) the ark-shaped interfaith Riggio-Lynch chapel designed by May Lin symbolizes the safe haven every child deserves. The entire CDF family, including the Freedom Schools Servant Leader Interns pictured here, sends a warm welcome to Joshua, De'Von, Indy, Amber and Clara.