

2012 Featured Speakers

CZ, Forum Master of Ceremonies

Dream.Lead.Achieve - Be the One!

Hailing from Jersey, Curtis Zackery, seeks to impact culture through the positive messages of hope and inspiration. CZ is a highly effective communicator who grabs the attention of audiences across the country through music and his high-energy speaking style. His experiences growing up in a diverse family fuel his desire for students to understand and embrace their individual uniqueness and use it to strengthen their communities.

Brittney Henry, Miss Washington 2011 and Youth Master of Ceremonies

Platform: Promoting Higher Education for Low Income Families

The challenges that I faced as a child of poverty were no different than the 40,000 low-income children in Washington State who are facing the same challenges today. For 18 years I was completely and utterly ashamed of my background, my family, and our reliance on welfare. Four years ago, my life took a dramatic turn when I decided to compete in a scholarship pageant to help pay for school. Questions came up in my interview about my history, and for the first time in my life, I told the truth. The moment the words left my lips, I literally had an epiphany and just knew without a doubt that this was my purpose in life. Not only to show my little sister that we could rise above our situation, but to share with as many poverty stricken kids as possible, the message that we are more than the low expectations set for us and to complete my education representing all of us. The multitude of things that I tried so hard to hide were actually my biggest tools to inspire others. In order to share my story, I work with Washington's most successful college outreach program for low-income students, The Northwest Learning and Achievement Group. NLA's specific focus is helping underrepresented and poor students reach higher education. NLA has worked for 12 years in central Washington, in partnership with low income school districts, with many students whose families have no experience with postsecondary education. NLA helps these students learn how to plan and prepare for college or postsecondary education and gives them a safe place to believe in their dreams. I am currently volunteering with the NLA as an advisor, advocate, motivational speaker, and fundraiser. I realized the core principle that higher education was indeed a ticket out of poverty and I am determined to use the adverse experiences that I endured as a child to make positive strides for others in the same situation. I wondered my entire life WHY ME and I have been shown the answer to that question every time I have the opportunity to speak before children like myself who need someone to believe in them and show them the impossible is indeed possible. My college degree and my work with the Miss America Organization have equipped me with the confidence, courage and edification needed to become a successful advocate for children in poverty.