

# The Orlando Times



## “Step Up For Students” Helps Central Florida Graduate Succeed



**Shamel Donawa**

June 28--On May 18, Shamel Donawa of Kissimmee, 18, donned a cap and gown and proudly accepted her diploma from Heartland Christian Academy in Kissimmee—an achievement that seemed impossible just five years ago due to her wavering academics.

Prior to being awarded the Step Up For Students Scholarship, locally administered by Children First Florida, Donawa struggled at her neighborhood public school where her grades were poor – mainly C’s, D’s and F’s. The scholarship made it possible for her to attend Heartland Christian Academy where she developed into a shining star.

Donawa’s mother felt that the scholarship was an answered prayer for her daughter, whose self-confidence and desire to learn had plunged.

“If I hadn’t received the scholarship, I can say with confidence that I would have dropped out,” Donawa said. “My problem areas weren’t addressed because there were 30 to 40 students in each classroom. I would cry myself to sleep because I began believing my teachers who told me I was dumb.”

Heartland’s teachers possessed a positive attitude about learning and encouraged Donawa to strive to be her best. Only two short months after entering Heartland, Donawa’s grades increased drastically.

“I can still remember walking through the doors of Heartland, and I was overwhelmed with smiling faces and warm greetings,” Donawa said. “At Heartland, everyone has an equal opportunity and the teachers work with the students individually to give us the confidence to succeed.”

Donawa graduated with honors and plans to complete her education at Valencia Community College where she has been participated in their dual-enrollment courses for the past two years.

“I will complete my associate’s degree at the community college, and then transfer to the University of Central Florida to become a registered nurse, and pursue a career as a labor and delivery nurse,” Donawa said. “I even received a college scholarship from Hospital Corporation of America, a Step Up For Students donor, to ensure my dreams do come true.”

Over 5,000 new Step Up For Students Scholarships are currently available for the Fall 2007 school year. Don’t delay and join nearly 17,000 students on the scholarships that can be used at over 900 private K-12 schools in Florida. For more information, please visit [www.stepupforstudents.com/parents.htm](http://www.stepupforstudents.com/parents.htm) or call (866) 739-1197.