

James Harris –

Three years ago when I was recommended and selected to Camp New Look, I never would have thought I'd be sitting here, next to Usher, speaking to distinguished members of the Education and Labor Committee!

Before camp, I was involved in some things that were not positive at all. Growing up in my neighborhood, I took a lot of negative things as just being the norm. But at camp, they showed me that this was not the norm and that I could do better."

As a student at J.C. Harmon High School in Kansas City, I didn't always plan to go to college. My primary goal wasn't getting a degree – it was making it in the music world as a rapper.

In 2007, I was selected to attend Usher's Camp New Look, where I learned to develop a business plan from start to finish and also earned the coveted Star Camper Award. That summer at camp I gained my first service experience working at the Atlanta Community Food Bank to sort 40,000 pounds of food. To know that I helped reach so many people who were in need was an unbelievable feeling. It taught me that no matter what I didn't have in my life there was someone out there who had less and I had the power to help.

Working with Usher who I believe is the true definition of Service leadership, he leads by example. Every time we participate in a service project he's there leading the way working just as hard as we are. He always tells autograph seekers, there'll be time for that later, now its time to work!

Today I'm majoring in business administration and entrepreneurship at Johnson Community College. Though I still aspire to be a successful musician, my dreams have changed dramatically since attending camp.

Camp New Look opened new doors for me and allowed me to become more business-oriented. At camp, they taught us that there is more to the music business than being an entertainer and in order to be a strong artist, you need to know the business side of the industry. A rapper with an accounting degree can manage his own books and has a second career to fall back on; we call it being a double threat.

I credit my mentors at Camp New Look for inspiring me to earn a college degree. They got my gears going in reverse and I started thinking differently. They believed in me when I didn't believe in myself. Even today, Usher's New Look continues to play a role by paying for my books and tuition.

In September 2008, I was one of 101 young leaders across the nation to participate in the historic ServiceNation Summit in New York City, attended by leaders from every sector of American society including Senator John McCain and then Senator Barack Obama. It was here that I became inspired to take my own community service to another level and be part of a positive change at home. I returned to Kansas City and with funding from New Look to host my own community service project, which has taught me a lot about organization and leadership.

Camp New Look pushed me to think past my environment and my circumstances. I learned not to let my situation or other people's labels hold me back from my dreams. Now I can overlook certain obstacles and use them to my advantage.

When my peers see me, it is a strong testimonial that anyone can achieve their dreams and if I made it, anyone can make it.

Thank you for your time and consideration!