

A Mother's Blueprint: The Shawn Carter Scholarship Foundation

BY TAMARA WARREN

Gloria Carter is the proud mother of four successful adult children—her youngest, Shawn Carter, is the celebrated recording artist and self-made entrepreneur widely known as JAY Z. JAY Z, a 14-time Grammy Award winner, has sold over 50 million albums and transformed popular culture. His success in business is indelible as CEO of RocNation and the apparel line Rocawear, co-owner of the Brooklyn Nets NBA team and former CEO of Def Jam Records. Gloria Carter is the woman who has given him the tools to grow into the successful man that he has become. She is also his partner in philanthropy.

JAY Z and Gloria Carter founded the Shawn Carter Scholarship Foundation in 2003, which was a grassroots effort that rapidly grew into a prominent 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

“I sat down and talked to my son and I said listen, there are a lot of urban kids whose issues are not being addressed. You have kids who do have a high GPA and a lot of them have a desire to continue their education. Let us be unique and do what no one else does. It is not just about getting into college; it is about getting through it. He said, ‘okay, let’s do it.’”

The organization provides supportive services and scholarships for

underprivileged students to complete college and enter the workforce. The Shawn Carter Scholarship Foundation has funded over \$1.3 million dollars in scholarships to 700 students studying at over 100 universities and vocational institutions. What is distinct about the Shawn Carter Scholarship Foundation is the hands-on approach taken by Ms. Carter. She keeps close tabs on her growing pool of recipients and travels with the students on annual college tours of historical black colleges and

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universities. The Foundation’s mission resonates with the record number of 3,600 applicants in 2012. More than 73 percent of the Foundation’s college tour applicants this year will be the first in their families to go to college. All seniors on the tour received at least one on-the-spot admission to a college on the tour. Part of what helps Ms. Carter and the Foundation staff drive home the message is the inspiration provided by JAY Z, who recently hosted two sold-

out concerts at Carnegie Hall to raise money for the Shawn Carter Scholarship Foundation and the United Way of New York City.

“You look at what we came from in an urban area—we came from struggle and now you have a person that you can connect with,” says Ms. Carter. “Here is a young man that came from the Marcy Projects that became a huge star, and I am just an ordinary mother that could be traveling around the world because of his success, but I chose to run an organization and he is willing to support it.”

Shawn Carter’s personal success story starts with his family’s roots in Bedford Stuyvesant, Brooklyn, dating back to 1946 when his grandparents moved from South Carolina to New York. “As a kid my mother was always involved with the community, even if it meant just bringing people together to have a cook out,” Ms. Carter says. “With her grooming me to be the matriarch, I’ve learned how to bring people together to get things done. My mother always told us you could have anything you want, but you have to work hard. She taught me that a closed fist can

never receive or give. She taught us that in order to receive, you have to give. You have to give with a pure heart. You give not looking for anything in return. That makes a dynamic impact.”

In many ways, Ms. Carter’s personal growth has mirrored her successful son’s—she overcame challenges and then focused on giving back to the community. “I had kids at a young age, but I was taught that I was always supposed to be responsible. I had four kids and I was married, and then suddenly, I had four kids to raise by myself. I worked security on the weekends at the World Trade Center so that I could take care of my family. I used to work with the controller of the City of New York. I started out as a file clerk and I worked my way up, and when I



JAY Z and his mother, Gloria Carter

retired, I was an investment analyst. During my time there, I mentored young people that came through the work-study program to emphasize that all you have to do is work hard and have determination.” As the years passed, Ms. Carter gravitated more and more toward volunteerism. She expanded her mentoring role to helping at-risk youth in the community, which sparked her interest in starting the Shawn Carter Scholarship Foundation. “I started the Shawn Carter Scholarship Foundation because I had been a mentor. I began to realize the effect that I had as a mentor on young people.”

She found herself sharing the advice

she had instilled in each of her children to overcome hardship and realize their potential. “There are two things I always tell my children. If your mind can conceive it, you can achieve it. There is nothing in the world you cannot have. The other thing you also need to know at any job you do, you have to love it. You do have choices. Utilize your choices.”

The Shawn Carter Scholarship Foundation is partnering with organizations that foster both academic and social development, in order to better prepare students for college. The scholarship recipients are required to conduct community service and are expected to come back and work as mentors with

the next pool of applicants. “You have to let them know it is not going to fall from the sky and you are not going to get it on the corner selling drugs. Yes, that may look appealing. That might be fast money, but also with that comes the fast life. And the majority of the drug dealers don’t make it to 25. Poverty is not having a lot of choices and financial support. It has a lot to do with not utilizing the systems that are available to you.”

The bus tours are at the heart of Ms. Carter’s work. “You have kids who’ve never been out of the projects. It is like taking kids out of a box, opening them up to the world. You read their essays stating, ‘I never thought that I was college material. I never thought that I could be anybody, and you realize you have touched them and that they’re hungry for it.’” By connecting with them on a one-on-one basis, the staff is able to help students identify where additional support can help—to pay for books or other essentials they may be lacking on campus.

While the Shawn Carter Scholarship Foundation is made up of staff and longtime volunteers, Ms. Carter intends to stay involved on a daily basis. She has countless stories of the youth she has impacted. “There is this one young man who is among my brightest scholars,” she says with considerable pride. “One day he looked at me when he was on the tour and he said, ‘I got it now.’ He graduates next year from Morgan State University.”

For more information about the Shawn Carter Scholarship Foundation, visit the website www.shawncartersf.com.

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