

Jacksonville Student Selected for 2022 'Be the Change' Scholarship at Florida Career College

Kaleem Gibson is a Medical Assistant Technician student at FCC Jacksonville who was selected for a full-ride scholarship from his essay about social justice.

JACKSONVILLE, FLORIDA, USA, September 7, 2022 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Kaleem Gibson has spent years trying to overcome his past, but the opportunity to share it and bring attention to what held him back, led him to a new sense of freedom and accomplishment as the winner of [Florida Career College's](#) Be the Change Scholarship for 2022.



Kaleem Gibson is a Medical Assistant Technician student at Florida Career College

You would never know from looking at him all that Kaleem has been through. Growing up in a predominantly white area in New Jersey he became accustomed to subtle and sometimes overt racism. He learned to accept it and not point it out.

“

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Kaleem Gibson

He spent years homeless before being arrested for selling drugs to an undercover officer. Not knowing where to turn for assistance, he plead guilty and begged the judge for treatment. He served 10 months in a treatment program within the jail and has been clean and sober ever since—but the felony charge on his record still haunts him.

Kaleem experienced this first-hand and shared his experience in an essay he submitted for this year's Florida Career College Be the Change Scholarship.

His submission outlined why everyone deserves a second chance at their dreams and the color

of their skin should not disqualify them from making a change.

"Don't count anyone out because of their past," he said. "Don't hold the stereotype against anybody – I want them to take away that anybody is capable of change no matter what race you are."

Today Kaleem has stable housing, a good job, and volunteers regularly with the non-profit that helped him find employment after his release. He is a motivational speaker at treatment centers and mentors convicted felons on housing resources available to them. He also hosts a weekly meet and greet in the community to discuss issues around racism. Despite his accomplishments, he has always dreamed of becoming a registered nurse and the charge on his record may keep that dream from becoming a reality.

In 2021, he decided to not let the fear of failure hold him back any longer. He took the first step and enrolled in the [Medical Assistant Technician program](#) at Florida Career College's Jacksonville campus.

"I realized that the world is going to be what it is and until that changes it will be, but one thing a man or a politician or nobody can take away from me is the education that I receive," he said. "If I go to Florida Career College and become a medical assistant technician, if the only purpose that serves is the knowledge that I gained and the experience with it, then that will have to be enough for me."

Throughout the program Kaleem worked hard to remain on the honor roll. The greatest part of the program, he said, was being asked by his instructors to become an ambassador. For staff on the campus, it was a no-brainer.

"I actually thought he was a doctor when I first saw him. He dressed sharp in his scrubs and looked the part of a doctor," said Joe Davila, campus president in Jacksonville. "The way he conducted himself with the utmost professionalism, even his peers would look to him for advice. He was very much like a magnet. People wanted to be around him."

"He was a phenomenal student," said Damarion Belford, associate director of education. "His grades were great. He was great with his skills. He was here every day on time. Above and beyond. He was just an exceptional student."

On Wednesday, August 3, Kaleem was named the winner of the Be the Change scholarship and was asked to read his essay out loud to a group of students and staff. He had not disclosed his story to anyone. When he finished reading, there was not a dry eye in the audience.

"At the end, from the number of people who came up to me and shook my hand and wanted to take a picture with me, I definitely felt the support. More importantly, I felt the acceptance," Kaleem said.

The Be the Change Scholarship was created in 2020 to give FCC students a voice in the discussion of social justice, equality and human rights. Applicants were asked to write an essay about a time they witnessed or experienced social injustice and what they personally were doing to bring about change in their community.

Kaleem's essay was chosen from nearly 200 entries by a committee of administrators, instructors and staff. As the recipient, Kaleem was awarded a full-ride scholarship for his program.

"I would like to thank the committee for choosing me for the scholarship and for just not judging me and having a sense of empathy for the struggles in my life," Kaleem said.

Kaleem is currently finishing up his externship. After he becomes a medical assistant technician, he plans to continue his education to become a Registered Nurse.

"A dream without footwork is but a mere fantasy," he said. "If we just sit around and think about what we want to do and never do it, it's just a fantasy. It's just a dream. You have to do some things in darkness even if just the littlest amount of light shines. If I want something I have to go and get it. A no doesn't necessarily mean a no forever, it just means no right now. You just have to persevere and keep pushing."

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