



CHAnge-makers

Julius Claybron is an Ivy Leaguer, a Cornell University graduate, who today works on the third floor of a towering office building that borders the Chicago River in Chicago's Loop. His daily routine involves working in a well-appointed office space, with high energy individuals who have experience and insights to offer as Julius masters the ins and outs of professional life.

His daily routine was not always this way, however. As a child, Julius and his grandmother used to look out of his window at the now-demolished Ickes Homes. His surroundings did not reflect his academic or personal potential, and with support from the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA), Julius has used his drive and dedication to shift his life in a new direction.

For many, one opportunity is all it takes to create the building blocks for success. Take internships for example.

Julius explains that "quality internship opportunities frequently require money and travel, and people with my background simply don't have the means to access those opportunities." Through CHA however, in the summer of 2012, Julius secured an internship in the CNA tower downtown working on Asset Management for CHA where he experienced for the first time the demands and rewards of a professional work setting.

"When I looked at my resume upon college graduation, the only conventionally professional experience listed was my CHA internship experience," said Julius. "The experience sticks out, and in a lot of ways these opportunities are a way to gain social capital to penetrate a professional setting. This was my first taste of professional life."

Julius took advantage of other CHA opportunities as well. A two-time CHA scholarship recipient, he took part in CHA's Take Flight college sendoff events, and became a mentor to other teens in CHA's Summer Business Leadership Program, sponsored in partnership with BMO Harris and DePaul University's Management & Entrepreneurship Department.

"With the help of the CHA I had the support I needed to explore my interests and upon graduation I was able to arrive to work with a sense of what to expect and how to conduct myself in a professional setting."

Today, Julius puts his skills to work at Swoon, a Chicago-based executive staffing firm whose clients include Excelon, Motorola and Liberty Mutual. Within six weeks of starting the position, he secured his first placement.

Julius says he's open to change and while he is currently focused on mastering his role and on networking with the companies to which he's gaining exposure, he is also looking to the future and eventually would like to pursue an advanced degree.

His recommendation to high schoolers and college students who are just starting out?

"Be fearless. I've been there and you need to have no fear in pursuing your dreams."

"Among my demographic - young, inter-city, black youth - there's a high college dropout rate and in my experience and in talking with my peers, this trend stems from uncertainty. What's needed is support from mentors, parents, faculty and advisors which I had access to through CHA, and which I encourage others to seek out. Ultimately, I'd say it's critical to responsibly explore and own your education."

This year CHA has received over 470 applications for 2017/2018 scholarships - the highest ever - a demonstrable measure of the appetite for education that exists among Julius' peers. Likewise Julius' persistence is not unusual. Of those who were awarded CHA scholarships in 2013/2014 and 2014/2015, 90 percent are still enrolled in college or, like Julius, have graduated.

CHA continues not only to provide scholarships but to increase access to higher education and careers in a variety of ways. Over the summer CHA youth will have access to roughly 2,400 paid employment and learning opportunities through CHA's Career Exploration Programs which allow youth to discover and pursue their interests.

Programs include opportunities like Documentary Filmmaking for Girls with professional filmmakers through DePaul University's School of Cinematic Arts, Game & Graphic Design to help youth develop their creative voice through DePaul's Management & Entrepreneurship Department, the Museum and Public Art Internship where youth work alongside talented artists and museum staff to explore architecture, design and public art, and internships in varying other locations including government agencies, private businesses and non-profit organizations across Chicago.

CHA has also partnered with Chicago City of Learning where young people can tap into more than 1,000 different on-line and on-site programs at any of CHA's nine Digital Resource Centers. From coding and game-creation, to leadership and self-discovery, the activities and interest-based learning opportunities are endless and available to youth all summer long.



Julius Clayborn is an Ivy Leaguer, a Cornell University graduate, who works at the executive staffing firm Swoon and is encouraging other young CHA youth to follow in his footsteps.