

## Students recognized for going from bad to better

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As ninth grader at Webb Junior High, John ██████ drank alcohol, smoked cigarettes, shoplifted and skipped class whenever he could get away with it.

His grades were usually C's and D's, with the occasional A in gym class. His aim was to do just well enough to graduate from high school.

Three years later, ██████, 18, hasn't missed a day of high school. His grades improved to where, this spring, he graduated from Leto High School with a 3.6 grade point average and plans to attend Florida International University with a partial academic and athletic scholarship.

"I used to hang out with the wrong people and that was the biggest part of my problem," ██████ said. "But if being cool means drinking, smoking, cursing and having premarital sex, I guess I don't want to be cool."

██████ and 39 other students were honored last month with Turnaround Achievement Awards. One student from each junior and senior high school in Hillsborough County was selected by the guidance counselors of their respective schools for the honor.

But ██████ didn't improve his grades without help. He spent 10 months during ninth grade in the Life is for Everyone (LIFE) program in Sarasota, which is designed to rehabilitate youths with drinking, drug or other behavioral problems.

"When I went into the LIFE program, I didn't think I had a problem," ██████ said. "Then after three or four months I realized, just by hearing other kids in the program talk, that I had the same problems as some of them did."

After that, with special permission, ██████ was enrolled in 10th-grade classes at Leto High.

██████ parents said the changes in their son have been dramatic. "John is more mature and willing to take blame when things go wrong," said his mother, Ellen ██████. "He's much more honest and open now. Parents should not be blind to their kids faults. They should ask themselves if their kids behave the same way with or without parental supervision."

"It's nice to be recognized for what I did, but it's something I should have been doing already," ██████ said.

Ben Hill Junior High student Samantha Shelton's story was different.

Shelton, 15, was a good student and had even been on the principal's honor roll a number of times. But in eighth grade things changed for her.

Her social life took on a new importance at school and the work was harder, Shelton said. Her guidance counselor, Joe Joeb, said Shelton ended up with a .6 grade point average.

"I never used to have to study before, so when I got my first report card I was devastated," she said. "I was afraid to raise my hand in class if I didn't understand what the teacher was saying because I was afraid my friends would laugh at me."

Shelton said she tried harder after her first report card, but she had already fallen too far behind to understand her assignments. As a result, Shelton failed eighth grade last year.

She went to summer school as a last resort to keep up with her classmates, but there was too much work to make up, so she had to repeat eighth grade this year.

"It was a swallow my pride type thing," Shelton said. "I couldn't accept failing last year. I was entered into an ILAP [Intensive Learning Alternatives Program], where the counselor told my mom that I have a chance to turn myself around."

The ILAP program, available to junior high students, helped Shelton to develop study habits and give her the one-on-one teaching she needed.

This year Shelton ended up with a 3.2 grade point average.

"I was so proud when Samantha received this award," said her mother, Karen Hale. "She used to lie about not having homework to do."

She has the best attitude this year. She is so responsible now."

Other northwest Hillsborough area recipients of the Turnaround Achievement Award were Cornelius J. Cox, Adams Junior High; Josie Hardy, Buchanan Junior High; Martondra Hutchins, Webb Junior High; Deon Barksdale, Chamberlain High; and Barrett Fell, Gaither High.

- Caption: PHOTO 2John [REDACTED] <FILED: DAILY>Samantha Shelton <FILED: DAILY>
- Memo: DOWN HOME

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