

Community Safety Summit Speech at the State House, October 13, 2009

Good afternoon my name is Nathanael Lopez. I am here today on behalf of YouthBuild New Bedford, hope collaborative, and the Shannon program. I'd like to first start off by giving thanks to Deirdre Lopes and Gloria Williams for providing me this opportunity to speak here today and also for giving me a second chance when no one else would. Well I'm here today to talk to everyone about my past experiences and situations, my present experiences and situations and of course what I plan to be my future experiences and situations. My life started of that of a typical inner-city kid. My parents divorced when I was six and my mother, 3 other siblings and I were left to fend for ourselves in the low income housing of New Bedford or as most people call them the projects. My young years growing up I was exposed to a lot of things that your average kid doesn't see; addicts shooting up outside, people dealing drugs from morning to night. It was very easy for me to fall prey to that lifestyle. After all it was all I had seen growing up. Now not to get it mistaken I came from a good home and my mother did her best to raise us right but a single mother is no match for what these kids are facing out here today. With the peer pressure in these streets, gang violence, high dropout rate, and no real vision of a positive future. They figure it's easier not to try then to try and get rejected or fail. I know, I was one of those youths not too long ago you see I've only recently begun to change my life around. Just one year ago my life was in complete shambles. I couldn't get a job. I had been in and out of jail a total of 3 times, had dropped out of high school at a very young age, and to be honest with you I thought I was done , finished, condemned to a life of crime and continue on my road to self destruction. That is until I found this program. They've exposed me to a whole new world. A world where there are no limitations only the ones that you set forth upon yourself. They showed me that there was still hope for me. Even when I didn't see it in myself they taught me that if I really want something in life just go for it stay focused work hard always remain humble and good things will come to you. In the short year that I have been involved with this program my life has done a complete 180 degree turn. I've grown to appreciate not only my neighborhood but my city as a whole. I've acquired this appreciation for my community by doing numerous hours of community service in places such as the local boys and girls club, the food bank , our community parks , our whaling museum, cleaning up our local streets and neighbor hoods and the list goes on and on. I recently received my G.E.D. and although it is an accomplishment I now understand that it can't end there. That was just one step I had to take in order to reach my true goal of going on to college and receiving my PhD. in sociology, psychology, or philosophy. I know it sounds like a lot but one that this program has taught me is that nothing is impossible if you take it one day at a time and keep your eyes on the prize. I was fortunate to have a program like this one to go to . a lot of youth today feel like they have nowhere to turn no one to talk to. Programs like this give these kids the proper venue for them to learn valuable social skills and work skills while at the same time giving them an education, a trade and on all around healthier view of life and themselves. To put it simply they give youth such as me and many others like me a fighting chance in this otherwise cruel society.

Sincerely, Nathanael Lopez