



## Inspiring Philadelphia women honored at 'Strictly Business' luncheon

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Two local women were recognized by JEVs Human Services during its 20th annual Strictly Business event, held at Loews Philadelphia on Friday. The two women, Tyisha Bates and Aliyah Hammond, were honored for overcoming great obstacles to find employment and thrive using [JEVS PA CareerLink](#) and Bridge to Employment programs, respectively.

Six hundred guests attended the event, including more than a dozen previous honorees, and Mayor Jim Kenney, who offered inspirational opening remarks. But it was Bates and Hammond, receiving Inspiration Awards, who stole the show, providing inspiration through their own stories of redemption using the new programs.

When she dropped out of high school in ninth grade, Hammond stumbled to find her path. The Northeast Philly resident couch- and house-hopped with family members from the ages of 15 to 19, when she discovered she was pregnant. That moment made her decide she needed to create a better life for her daughter, now 3. Hammond discovered [YouthBuild Charter High School](#), an alternative high school to help people complete high school. She enrolled and later was selected to participate in the new Bridge to Employment pilot program.

An education and skills-training program developed by JEVs Human Services and Einstein Healthcare Network, the program was funded by the Lenfest Foundation and launched in 2016. Eighteen students selected for the program began basic training from July through September before more extensive career training followed through May, with interviewing boot camp, resume writing workshops, professional dress days and more. At competition, JEVs assisted the students in securing jobs and then continued coaching and supervision in the early months of their new positions.

“When working with young people, ages 17 to 24, you need different modalities,” explained Alia Sutton-Bey, a program instructor at Bridge to Employment. “Their biggest hurdle at this age is their peer relationships. They need help figuring out who they are before they can determine what they want to do.”

Hammond discovered she had a passion for the emergency room. “As soon as I tried it I just knew, ‘this was my job.’ I was so excited,” she said. Originally beginning with classes to become a Certified Administrative Medical Assistant, the high-energy needs and her personality led her to transition into a full-time job at Einstein, Elkins Park, where she works in the ER and plans to become a Practical Nurse through the PITC Institute.

Her mother, Lakesha Rozier, who proudly took off work to celebrate her daughter’s achievements at the Strictly Business luncheon, said Hammond “went from someone who had no clue what to do, what to eat, what to wear, to a take-charge person who knows exactly what she wants and how to do it.”

For Bates, getting back on her feet in her career came years after domestic abuse, struggling to raise her three boys and battling depression so severe she was unable to work for years. Understanding part of her recovery meant she needed to work again, she attended a PA CareerLink workshop. Little did she know the decision would change her life.

“I went to CareerLink to find a job. It ended up being more than just job seeking; it was about life skills,” said Bates. “Miss Amber’s workshop? When she spoke? It was if she was speaking directly to me. After that, I realized it was time to wake up, speak up and change. 2017 was a life-changer for me.”

Amber Key has spent three years as an instructor at CareerLink, and a total of 16 years at JEVS. “When I give the workshops, some of the people will not speak up, but I know those who come to see me after the program to talk are typically the ones dedicated. Tyisha came to speak to me and I could see it in her eyes where this moment was a turning point for her.”

Bates worked diligently at PA CareerLink, taking advantage of all of the program’s offerings. She began an internship at JEVS and found, in her words, a second family in those who worked with the program. “We know that just offering interviewing skills and resume skills and all of that job prep doesn’t work if the spirit isn’t there. We work on much more than job skills; we work on life skills and self-improvement,” Key said. “We can’t just start with jobs. We improve the person first. If you improve the person, you improve the employee.”

Added Bates, “My goal was to simply change by getting a job. The program took me to another level.” She is now employed full time by the City of Philadelphia. Still inspired to do more, she wants to become an advocate and is active as a volunteer and mentor with several organizations to end domestic violence. One day, she would like to begin a nonprofit to help other survivors of domestic violence improve their lives, too.

While becoming a strong role model for other women is nice, it’s becoming a strong role model for the kids that makes Bates smile. “My oldest [17] said, ‘I want to be with a woman as strong as you,’ and my youngest [5] just said, ‘Mom, you’re awesome.’ A smile took over and she was momentarily speechless.

During the Strictly Business luncheon, JEVS announced a new mentoring program with corporate sponsorship from Saxbys, with Saxbys CEO Nick Bayer encouraging volunteer mentor signups at the event.

“Strictly Business celebrates those who have achieved, but also paves the way for future accomplishments on the individual and community level,” said Jay Spector, president and CEO of JEVS. “We are celebrating individuals who envisioned a better life for themselves, who now have independence and a sustainable future, as well as the local business and community partnerships that make all this possible.”

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