

# Determination helps man get back on his feet

by Bettse Folsom

Brandon Rucker, 20, grew up in a home of verbal and physical abuse. His family never celebrated his birthday, and his self-esteem was continually attacked. He was taught he was worthless.

"I would make up excuses in life where I was the bad person," Rucker said. "I never believed anyone cared for me."

Although his older cousin, Sherry Howard, loved him, Rucker had to learn and obtain things the hard way. He lied about his age to get his first job selling candy in order to buy his middle school supplies. After a while, he moved out of town to live with his grandparents. He said those were the best two years of his life.

Unfortunately, his grandparents grew ill, forcing him to move back with his parents.

"It was the same thing I went through before," Rucker said. "Only this time was worse."

It was so bad at home that as Rucker advanced into high school, he had to transfer between six different schools. That put him

academically behind.

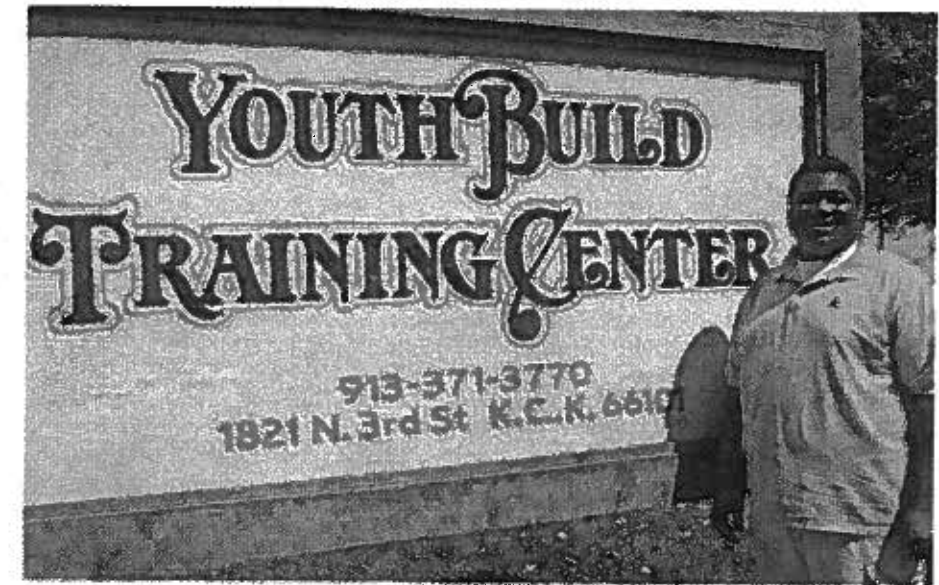
"The day I turned 18 years old, I moved out of my parents' house and stayed with Sherry Howard," Rucker said. "She gave me love and encouragement and support."

Howard showed Rucker a different way of living and how to become independent yet derive strength from his Christian faith. Howard taught him self-respect, Rucker said, and to maintain a home and keep it clean. She also encouraged him to take the next step.

Rucker said he contacted the Liaison for the Homeless, part of the Kansas City, Kansas school district, which gave him much-needed support and help. Liaison for the Homeless provides food, access to free lunch, school supplies and resources to help with clothes for homeless children.

"I love my kids; they are so wonderful," said Staci Pratt, director of Liaison for the Homeless. "They want to go to school."

However, Brandon felt he needed further growth and contacted the Kansas City, Kansas Housing



Authority, and within a short while, he had his own place to live.

Nevertheless, Rucker said he wasn't really doing anything with his life. He then heard about YouthBuild KCK, which helps young people obtain their GED, apply for college scholarships and learn leadership and job skills.

"They are teachers of the real world . . . teachers of life," Rucker said. "I thank them with all that's in me and all my power. They taught me the way of life, the best and real way."

According to Rucker, this is where he found love and support and structure for his life. He feels himself changing every day. In addition to his work with YouthBuild KCK, he also composes songs and is planning to follow his desire and work in culinary arts.

"I believe it took me this long to get this far," Rucker said. "When you sum it all up, this was the will of God and made me who I am today."

Two of his current songs are entitled "I Made It; We Made It" and "I Have Been Down So Long, It Is Time For Me To Rise." He also

assists other teenagers who are homeless and at-risk and gives them a hand and home to live in until they regain their feet.

"I found out that my name, Brandon, means 'high in spirit,' and I try to live up to my name," Rucker said. "My motto is 'I am not giving up; my heart is fixed; my mind is made up; I am determined to hold out to the end.'"

Last year, Liaison for the Homeless served 1,019 children in Wyandotte County. Already after the first weeks of the new school year, they have had to assist more than 400 children and expect more. They are in constant need for ready-prepared foods, hygiene accessories, socks and underwear. To find out how to contribute, contact Staci Pratt at [stpratt@kckps.org](mailto:stpratt@kckps.org) or call 913-322-8170.

To learn more about YouthBuild KCK, go to <http://www.unitedway-wyco.org> and click on YouthBuild KCK.

To contact Bettse Folsom, community correspondent, e-mail [bettsef@wyandottepublishing.com](mailto:bettsef@wyandottepublishing.com).

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## KCKCC to hold digital cameras for beginners class

A class on "Digital Cameras for Beginners" will be offered on Saturday, Oct. 10 at Kansas City Kansas Community College. It will be held in Room 3450 of the Science Building from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. with an hour break for lunch.

Taught by Bryan Whitehead, the class will start with basic tips for improving the quality of photos followed by techniques used by professional photojournalists to create eye-catching, story-telling photos.