

## Tivoli teenager Aims For Career in Economics



Nineteen-year old Natasha Thompson is taking the next step towards achieving her dream as she gets ready to attend the University of the West Indies, Mona, this September. For her, a career in Economics and International Relations, could really take her places - far removed from the reality of her daily life in Tivoli Gardens in west Kingston, Jamaica. Natasha is one of a number youth, coming out of the West Kingston Incursion, to have benefited from assistance from Scotiabank through their Shining Star Scholarship programme.

As a twelve-year-old then, she remembers the horrors of the May 24, 2010 month-long assault on her community by both gang members and security forces. Natasha says she was terrified of going to and from school, or even venturing out of her community due to the fear of being caught in the middle of a crossfire.

There was much trauma seeing the brutality up close - the dead, the burning buildings, the constant barrage of gunfire, and the roadblocks all around. She says her childhood changed forever. "There were some things that would have been normal that I just didn't do anymore. I couldn't," she says. "I couldn't go to late classes - that was totally out. I use to love sports - badminton, hockey, basketball but I had to pull back from that too because I couldn't participate in training in the evenings. It was really an awakening. It opened up my eyes to how violent this world can be. So many persons died for no reason. Everything felt like this was a dark time. I was able to pull through just because of Scotia. They counselled me and pushed me because they knew how it affected me. They helped me to do projects and to do homework."

It was support she well needed. Things were hard. Her father died tragically when she was seven years old, and her mother was not a regular part of her life. She grew up with a stepmother and her children - who all lovingly pulled her into what she calls her 'big' family of seven members. There was assistance from a kind neighbour who owned a shop and who sometimes took care of bus fare and other necessities for school. "I was on the PATH program but there were times I went to school without lunch, and I would walk to school sometimes when I had no bus fare," Natasha says.

Now as she prepares to take another step on her educational journey, she credits Scotiabank for the strong support they provided, including funding her education throughout her five years at

Excelsior High School, and subsequently the two additional years at St. Georges College in Kingston.

Most recently the Bank extended a hand again, with a Scotiabank scholarship to cover tuition and expenses for a year at university. As she chatted she reviewed her stock of candies and chocolates which she was hoping to sell to make extra money for university. "Yes, they are providing that money but I know I'm going to need more to take care of the other things so I have to try and help myself," she explained.

"The Scotia family is like my family, they have my back," she says of the organization that literally pulled her from a life of poverty, and gave her opportunities many others in her community crave.

"I'm so thankful for the help," she says of the boost from Scotia, "but I know had have to work hard to maintain my scholarship."

But it is hard work which she doesn't mind, and to which she is well accustomed. Natasha copped 6 grade twos and two grade ones in exams at Excelsior, also scoring two Grade Threes and two Grade fours in advanced level studies at Georges College. She chose Economics and International Relations, partly for the challenge, but also to help to make a real change she says, in a country whose economy is not where it needs to be to give its youth a fighting chance. "Yes it is my passion, it's what I want to do, but I realise it's something that is really needed in Jamaica. If I can help to make Jamaica one of the best developing countries in the world, then I will," she vows.