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Senior Grows Up Fast, Beats the Odds Castillo Keeps Family Together and Keeps Her Grades Up

By [Kim Centazzo](#)

May 30, 2007

While Aleyna Castillo grew up, she watched her mother's illness slowly take over both their lives. Her mother has Multiple Sclerosis (MS).

Castillo's mother was diagnosed with MS, a disease that slowly attacks the central nervous system, when the 18-year-old was in elementary school.

"At first it started with her hands. All of a sudden she wouldn't be able to move them," Castillo said. "We never thought it was going to amount to her being in a wheelchair."

Castillo, a student at Dominion High School, sits in class all day. When the final bell rings, she heads to her part-time job at a day care. At 6 p.m. she heads home to cook for her mother and 9-year-old cousin, Anthony. After supper, she clears the table, picks up around the house and helps her mother change her clothes and get into bed.

After all that, Castillo does her homework. Despite all of the obstacles in her life, the senior manages to complete homework and projects on time and maintain a strong grade point average.

"This whole experience has changed my outlook on life. I'm just glad to have her in my life," she said. "We're a team effort and I wouldn't want it any other way. This is my life. I live it."

For all of her efforts, Castillo received the 2007 Beat the Odds Scholarship Thursday, May 24, at the Old Courthouse, in Leesburg.

PAMELA L. BROOKS, a Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court judge, described the third annual Beat the Odds scholarship awards ceremony as one of her favorite days of the year.

"Every now and then, you meet someone with strength, determination and a tender heart," Brooks said, "who has the ability to overcome."

Brooks recognized five women, including Castillo, for their ability to overcome obstacles in their lives with a cash reward.

Vanita Perry and Crystal Travers, seniors at Dominion High School, and Sarah Rudden, a senior at Loudoun County High School, received \$5,000 scholarships from the Loudoun County Chapter of Beat the Odds.

Castillo said she will apply the check to her tuition at University of North Carolina in Greensboro, N.C., in the fall, where she plans to study early childhood education.

"I know I like working with people," she said. "So I'm going to keep doing that. Instead of working with my mom, I'll be able to help some kids in the future."

BEAT THE ODDS is a nationally recognized project that rewards teens who overcome obstacles such as poverty, physical, emotional and substance abuse and family issues, in an effort to better themselves at school and in the community. The project was initiated by the Children's Defense Fund in 1990. Loudoun County began a chapter of the organization three years ago.

The local chapter is made up of Sheriff's Office, offices of the Commonwealth's Attorney and Public Defender, Loudoun County Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse,



Photo by [Kim Centazzo/The Connection](#)

Sen. Mark Herring (D-33) stands with, from left, Sarah Rudden, Crystal Travers, Aleyna Castillo and Vanita Perry at the third annual Beat the Odds Ceremony at the Old Courthouse in Leesburg.

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Juvenile Court Services unit and the Department of Family Services.

ALBANY ROYAL received the Beat the Odds Scholarship in 2006. She and her family moved to Sterling after Hurricane Katrina destroyed their New Orleans home last year. Despite the move, Royal managed to graduate from Dominion High School on time and with honors. She applied her scholarship money to the nursing program at the Monroe Technology Center.

"I will be graduating in three weeks. I wouldn't have been able to do it without that scholarship," Royal said, with tears in her eyes. "Life is very unpredictable and you should cherish every moment."



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