Resilience—the ability to persevere in the face of adversity or challenges—is a difficult characteristic for most people to obtain. In fact, many people find it difficult to overcome these challenges and they simply give up. That is certainly not the case with these young women, and what makes their stories and perspectives even more remarkable is that they have learned not to let obstacles stand in their way of success. Whether working as young entrepreneurs or working tirelessly for others in need, these women have learned to face their problems head on and find innovative solutions to them. And they demonstrate a deep compassion for others and a drive to succeed that few people of their age develop.

Lauren Huffman, for example, learned at a very young age that she had a special affinity for dogs. As a triplet, she wanted to distinguish herself from her sister and brother to learn what made her unique. As you’ll read in her profile, she was only in the fourth grade when she began her own successful business. While operating her business and going to school, she also gave generously of her time through her church. And she has very big plans for her future.

Life was not easy for Deanna Ratliff. As a pregnant 16-year-old high school student, she was angry and unsure about the future for herself and her unborn baby. Ratliff demonstrated remarkable resilience for a young woman her age, as you’ll discover when you read her story. She is determined to succeed and she is not afraid to work hard to make that happen. She overcame tough obstacles and continues to do so.

Aslyne Rodriguez believes that all children should have access to a good, quality education, and at a very early age she began to dedicate her efforts to ensure that could happen. As soon as she graduated from college, each step in her career helped her play a role in helping children. Her resilience and determination have helped her forge a path that she finds rewarding.

A very busy college student at Otterbein University, Nisa Williams’ resilience has given her the confidence to coordinate an important student program that teaches others the importance of preparation and mentoring. In addition to this, she plays a leadership role in other activities and areas of her life. Her maturity and dedication have given her the opportunity to have a positive impact on other students.

As you can see, one common characteristic these young women display is a determination to help others, especially other young women, students or children. As you will find as you read their stories, they have pursued uncommon or unique choices in their lives, and these choices have given them special opportunities to work with others and make a difference in their communities. They have a passion to succeed, and a passion to give to others. It is a formidable combination, and one that bodes well for our community’s future.
Lauren Huffman
8TH GRADE STUDENT, MCCORD MIDDLE SCHOOL

As a triplet, Lauren Huffman says that people often think she and her siblings share the same interests, thoughts, and opinions, so she constantly tries to find ways to stand out as an individual. When she was in the fourth grade, she turned her love of animals into her own dog walking business and says that her friends are extremely important to her.

Huffman, who juggles a busy schedule, still makes time to volunteer through Lifeline Christian Mission bagging food and sorting clothes for people in Haiti and Honduras, and is active with The Girl Scouts. She also serves at her church and says that God, her family and her friends are extremely important to her.

WHAT SHE LOVES MOST ABOUT COLUMBUS:
“There is so much to do in Columbus. Since I love animals, the Columbus Zoo is one of my favorite places to visit, and I would love to volunteer there when I’m older.”

Deanna Ratleff

Deanna Ratleff has had to learn to be resilient. At the age of 18, she was a pregnant high school student. She was attending East High School, and her mother had moved to Atlanta to attend school there. She was living in a shelter. Ratleff describes herself as rebellious and homeless. Then she learned about the Center for Healthy Families, or as she puts it, “Well, they really found me.” The Center for Healthy Families sends a group of women to East High every Wednesday to meet with pregnant teens and talk to them about their lives. Ratleff’s resource advocate, Melanie Hill, provided Ratleff with advice and support, two things she really needed. “She was the best. I could call her and talk to her about anything and she would give me the best advice that she could,” Ratleff says. “I went from being rebellious and homeless to understanding and grateful.”

Two years later, Ratleff is a single mother trying to support herself and her child, and attending college whenever she can. After graduating from East High School, the shelter moved her into a home, a low-income apartment she had applied for before leaving her mother’s home. Fortunately, the shelter paid for Ratleff’s rent and utilities for six months while they helped her get a job. Ratleff worked at Tim Hortons for 10 months, and currently she is looking for a new job so she can provide for her child and pay her bills. Through her resilience, Ratleff is determined to earn her degree.

WHAT SHE LOVES MOST ABOUT COLUMBUS:
“I love the fact that there is always somewhere for you to go, whether you like to party or just go to the park—there is always something to do.”

Aslyne Rodriguez
CO-EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, DEVELOPMENT & COMMUNITY RELATIONS, AFTER-SCHOOL ALL-STARS OHIO

Ally Rodriguez is committed to serving disadvantaged youth. After graduating from college, she was accepted into the Teach for America program, a national corps of recent college graduates who commit two years to teach in urban and rural public schools to expand educational opportunities. Though she sometimes struggled with societal inequities and educational expectations for her students, Rodriguez knew that the impact she had on her students was more important than the struggles she faced. That resilience changed her life.

After her two years with Teach for America, Rodriguez returned to Ohio to work for former State Senator Tom Roberts, the minority leader on education. That position reaffirmed her career commitment to serving disadvantaged youth and ultimately led her to her current position with After-School All-Stars Ohio, a national non-profit organization whose mission is to provide free daily, out-of-school programs that keep children safe and help them achieve in school and in life.

WHAT I LOVE MOST ABOUT COLUMBUS:
“Columbus will continue to grow and thrive as long as the community continues to invest in it.”

Nisa Williams
STUDENT COORDINATOR, UBUNTU PROGRAM

Nisa Williams leads a busy life, and resilience plays a big role in her many endeavors. While working for Otterbein’s Phonathon, she had to call parents and friends to ask for donations to Otterbein University. Although the task was difficult at times, Williams acknowledges that it made her more resilient as a communicator. Now, as she mentors high school students and volunteers in other capacities, she relies on that resilience to build character and confidence.

Williams is an active college student. She currently serves as mentor and coordinator for the Ubuntu Program at Otterbein. This program uses an African concept of community to teach students that preparation for college and commitment to others through mentoring greatly contributes to their community as a whole. Volunteers like Williams work one-on-one with students in surrounding high schools and middle schools to expose them to a college environment and to promote positive behavior and a positive view of their futures. Despite this huge commitment, Williams still finds time to act as executive administrator of the Otterbein Gospel Choir and lead a small Bible Study. Currently in her third year at Otterbein, she plans to attend graduate school and pursue a doctorate degree in psychology.

WHAT SHE LOVES MOST ABOUT COLUMBUS:
“I love that the Columbus community reveals opportunities, new ideas and goals of all people. Columbus is a diverse community where people get along well with others.”

www.worthington.k12.oh.us/Domain/11

www.asusohio.org

www.otterbein.edu