Columbus student Lynden Simmons, a junior, spoke about his journey from homelessness to the honor roll at a gathering celebrating community leaders at Christopher Columbus High School. GREGORY CASTILLO/FOR THE MIAMI HERALD

By Alexi C. Cardona

Lynden Simmons was walking home from Palmetto Middle School one day when he saw all his family’s belongings strewn on the front lawn of their Pinecrest home. He learned from his mother that they had been evicted and needed to find a new place to live.

After spending a few days at a hotel, Lynden, who at the time was 13, moved into a homeless shelter with his three siblings, mother and stepfather. For three months, he abided by the 7:30 p.m. curfew placed by the shelter. He shared a space with several families and could not take private showers. At times he would not eat the food the shelter provided and held off to eat school lunch the next day.

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It was a tough transition for him, he said, but he tried to be strong for his family.

“I didn’t mope about it,” Lynden, now 16, said. “I just had to cope with it because I had younger brothers and I couldn’t fail them.”

For those three months, he kept what he was going through from friends and his then-girlfriend. He delved into his school work and kept his grades up. He promised himself that he and his family would never go through what they had gone through again.

“I feel proud that during that time, I had my best academic year. I was taking all advanced and honors courses. I was able to go to school and smile. No one knew what was going on at all,” he said.

But last week, a crowd of about 400 Christopher Columbus High School students, faculty members and visitors listened intently as Lynden shared his story.

“It meant everything to me that he had the strength to tell his story,” said Linda Jones, Lynden’s mother. “When he was in the shelter, it gave him the inspiration to direct his life in a positive way.”

Jones expressed regret over not being able to provide sufficiently for her family, but she is content with how far her son has come and with how many people believe in his future.

Lynden, now a junior at Columbus, is vice president of his junior class and president of 305-United, an organization aimed at helping less fortunate families. He wants to be a lawyer, but his mom is certain he’ll be a senator.

“I care about my family, my friends, my church, school. The community is important to me,” Lynden said. “I don’t know where I’ll end up, but I want to give back in any way I can, without a thought.”

Lynden and his family are grateful for the kindness that had been extended to them when they were in need.

Step Up for Students, an organization that gives scholarships to students from low-income families, gave Lynden a scholarship to help pay his Columbus tuition. He also receives financial aid from the school.

In the eighth grade, Lynden played basketball for the Miami Sharks, a youth sports team. The Miami Sharks families got together to contribute the remaining tuition.

Jose Mas, president and CEO of Coral Gables-based MasTec Inc., a multinational engineering and construction company, mentors Lynden and used to coach him when he was playing with the Miami Sharks.

“I’m not sure how many people know how hard he had to fight to get here,” Mas said. “He’s an unbelievable kid who fully understands the opportunities given to him, and he’s done so much for me. He’s kept me grounded.”