

# Sixers' James Ennis makes donation to a cause close to his heart

<https://www.nbcsports.com/philadelphia/76ers/sixers-james-ennis-poverty-nonprofit-donation-achievability>



By [Serena Winters](#) October 22, 2019 9:00 AM

When James Ennis learned about ACHIEVEability, it hit home. ACHIEVEability is a local nonprofit in West Philadelphia focused on homelessness and breaking the generational cycle of poverty.

This summer, Ennis returned to a place that brings back a lot of memories. After hosting a free kids day camp at Westpark in Ventura, California, Ennis traveled a few blocks down the road to Westview Village, a public housing community where he grew up. Ennis hadn't been back since he left to play basketball, and this time it looked a little different. A brand-new basketball court, which was being dedicated in his name, was now standing in place of his childhood home.

"The West Village projects," Ennis said to NBC Sports Philadelphia when talking about his childhood. "Where the basketball courts are right now, that's where our place was at. ... It's where we used to live."

Ennis can remember multiple times when his family **needed a helping hand growing up.**

“We were unstable a lot. I went to four different high schools my freshman year.”

There was one program his family was in for a few months where he remembers his entire family staying in one room with five beds.

There was another that he simply said was much worse. There was also the hotel in Oxnard, Budget Gardens, that they stayed in while waiting for housing.

“There was this one room. One bed. And that was when I was a freshman in high school — this was all during high school. I stayed in a hotel in Oxnard, and every morning we had to walk to the bus station and take the bus to Ventura High School, but no one knew where we were going. We just always got on the bus and left. It was tough, but I'm glad everything worked out and we're here now.”

Ennis credits his father with keeping his family together through such difficult times.

“I respect my dad a lot,” Ennis said of his father keeping the family together. “I thank my dad. ... I feel like if my dad just left, we would've all split up and gone different ways, but he stayed, and that's how we stayed together.”

“I'm glad everything worked out and we're here now.”

--

According to the most recent 2018 U.S. Census Bureau, the poverty rate in the United States is 11.8 percent.

In Philadelphia, nearly a quarter (24.5 percent) of residents — and 34.6 percent of children — live below the poverty line, making it the poorest of America's 10 largest cities.

Harold Barrow, now the programming and outreach manager for **ACHIEVEability**, was just another statistic. After growing up in an abusive household and using drugs at 11 years old, Barrow dropped out of school and was living on the streets by 14.

By the time he was 30 and living in an abandoned house across from Carlton Park in Germantown, he also had an infant daughter, Deiana. Thankfully, **ACHIEVEability** was there and took him in.

“For me, I came to this program not really knowing that I could be anything but a heroine addict, homeless,” Barrow said. “That was going to be my plight in life and that nothing else was going to happen good for that — that I was just going to die being an addict. They were like no, you can re-write the story, but you've got to work hard.”

So that's what Barrow did. Incrementally, with affordable housing through ACHIEVEability and a manageable action program that held him accountable, Barrow held his first job at Popeyes and received an academic scholarship to Drexel University (after graduating from community college with a 3.87 GPA). When he struggled with classes at Drexel, they helped him find a learning psychologist and a tutor.

For eight years, Barrow was a beneficiary of the program. And ever since, he's been giving back to those that come aboard.

"We take families at different levels ... all of them are homeless, all have addiction or domestic violence. Some of it is generational poverty. For us, it is important for us to see families move from impoverishment to self-sufficiency. When I started working here was when my social worker said no more food stamps for you. You've got to learn how to do without that. We are there for families throughout this whole process."

And being here with families throughout this whole process is something that Ennis can really relate to, and one of the reasons he chose to donate \$15,000 to the program.

"I feel like this program was a lot different than the program that I was in (growing up), because basically once you got on your feet, they think you're OK and they put you back on the street," Ennis remembers of similar programs growing up. "But [ACHIEVEability] makes you accomplish things to stay there. I think that's really good. I wish they had that back then."

---

And accomplishing results is exactly what ACHIEVEability has, well ... achieved. Since 2014, 100 percent of high school seniors associated with ACHIEVEability have graduated and 80 percent have enrolled in college.

"One of the things I remember the executive director (Jacques Ferber) saying is that we really want you to build a life that once you look at the life you have now, you'll look back and never want to trade that in," Barrow said. "That really became reality for me. I ain't going back to that. No matter what I had to do."

In the past year, ACHIEVEability has served over 115 families and 215 children.

"If you talk to our families and ask them why they are doing this, they will give a lot of reasons, but almost everyone says because I want a better life for my kids," Jamila Morris-Harrison, current executive director, said. "I want a better life for my family. I want to give them something that I wasn't able to get, that sort of commitment to the kids is a really powerful motivator."

----

This past Friday night, at the Sixers' final preseason game against the Washington Wizards, Ennis and Barrow got to meet up for the first time. A group of 50 people from ACHIEVEability were in attendance. Ennis took pictures and signed Sixers souvenirs, but most impactfully told the group that he understands where they all came from and reminded them to believe in themselves and stay strong.

For Harold, he hopes Ennis understands the impact that his donation will have.

"You just don't know the impact that that money is going to have on some homeless family, some struggling family, it's just going to make all the difference in the world, man. And I would tell people all the time, stories like mine don't happen in a vacuum, it happens because people care enough to give and get involved and volunteer and become a part of it, because in poverty and homelessness, there is no such thing as delayed gratification.

"You don't know about working hard for something now to have it later, you're just kind of like, I hope tomorrow I have some food or tomorrow I have somewhere to lay my head. You're not hoping anything beyond tomorrow or tonight. I hope tonight I have somewhere to go that's safe. Donations for people like himself make all the difference in the world. Some person is going to have another story, a success, donations from people like them, that just care. I don't know why he looked at our organization and we touched his heart in some way to make him want to give, but it makes all the difference in the world."