My name is Sierra and I completed the course: Leadership and Conflict Resolution in the year 2012.

When presented with the idea of an Action Plan during my stay at Brown University's Leadership Institute, my class was asked the question: "What can you do to help and better your community?" This question opened a broad spectrum of possibilities. I decided to choose a topic that was personal to me. I suggest this to anyone who is deciding what their Action Plan topic should be: Choose something you care about. It makes it a much more worthwhile experience. A man I knew was laid-off from his career at a well-known manufacturing plant. He has no college education; therefore, he had a very hard time looking for a replacement job. He was well over the average college age so he thought it trivial to go back to school. This is where I got the basis for my idea. The community I live in is an area with a very high unemployment rate. This is along with very low graduation rates at secondary and post-secondary levels. There is a connection here: If a person gets a degree or certificate after high school, then it is easier to find and/or keep a job. Continuing education after high school is often thought of as unattainable for many people, for many reasons. I wanted to show people that although it may not be everyone's ambition to go to college or a tech school, it is a goal that is reachable. I just had to get the information to the public.

My Action Plan was a Financial Aid Fair. Many of us high school students have been to "college fairs" where we can go to booths and talk to representatives about the school that they are representing. This was essentially the idea. However, instead of being told about the admissions rate or sports team the school has to offer, people could come to my Financial Aid Fair and talk to representatives about the scholarships and other financial opportunities. I feel like this information is definitely out there. It's just not always so easy for people to find. I wanted to bring it all to one place and make it attainable to the local public who may not know where else to find it.

This process was challenging from start to finish. The first thing I had to do was decide on a place to host the event. I started by calling a few local convention centers and community halls to see if they had space available. Many of these places did not want to donate the space because I was so early on in the decision making process. This was a set-back but it was only minor. Next, I called the mayor's office and set up a meeting to discuss possible locations that would hold the fair. At the meeting, the mayor's office said that they would hold it in the main
lobby of their building, which was great! We picked a day and time and they told me all of the things I would need to do to host the event.

The next step was to call local schools and ask if they would like to send representatives to my event. I told them that they would need to send one or two representatives that would be willing to discuss the financial opportunities of their school. They would be doing things such as answering questions about scholarship opportunities to talking about financial aid in general. I tried to keep the schools as local as possible. This was so the people who benefitted from the fair and got their degree, would hopefully stay in the area and bring more jobs to the community. I called many schools, but they were leery of the fact that a high school student was doing this on her own. In the end, a mixture of five local community colleges and tech schools agreed to participate.

Next, to advertise the fair I had the mayor's office send out an advertisement to all newspapers and news stations in the area. I also emailed all the local area guidance counselors and sent them a flyer with information on the event. Lastly, I had to help set-up, host, and take down the event. This was the easy part. Although I was anxious, the fair did just fine. I was interviewed for several news stations and some people came and benefitted from the fair. I am extremely proud of myself for completing this Action Plan. Before the Brown program, I would have never thought that I would be doing something this big. Public speaking was never one of my strong points. This project required me to step outside my boundaries and have meetings with important people, make MANY phone calls, and host an entire event. It was one of the best experiences of my life because I learned that I can be a leader on a much larger scale. Although I am just a high school student, I was actually able influence at least one person's life that day and that is something I can carry with me.