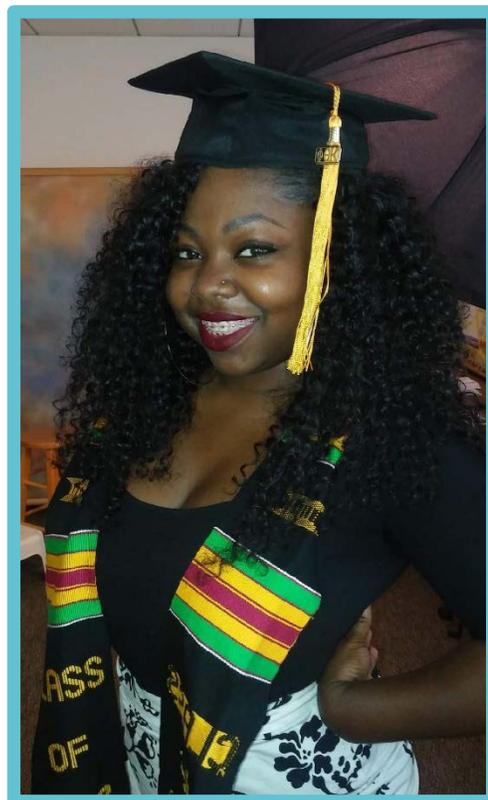


Foster Care as a Support to Families, Not a Substitute for Parents

Beating the Odds: Overcoming Improbability to Achieve Great Things

Many know the current graduation-rate statistics for youth in foster care attending college. The statistics show that 97 percent of youth formerly in foster care who attend college will not finish. United Friends of the Children (UFC) helped me not only beat these odds but inspired me to reach back and make an impact. One week after my 18th birthday, I was emancipated from the foster care system. I was accepted into California State University, Long Beach (CSULB), and received a college scholarship via UFC's Scholars Program and transitional housing via their Pathways program. Besides financial and housing assistance, I was provided with the support of Elizabeth, who was designated as my college counselor. Through the years after leaving foster care, Elizabeth would become not only my college counselor but a mentor, teacher, and inspiration as well.

I was not an easy student. I struggled my first year of college with budgeting, boundaries, and motivation. I was unprepared. The skills necessary to thrive academically, professionally, and personally felt far from within my reach. CSULB was entirely new to me. I walked into lecture halls and felt small and insignificant because I did not understand the material. Also, financial aid was a new concept to me, and I ended up overspending on items like good food, which I could finally afford and was much better than my usual food bank staples of top ramen and hot dogs. Unfortunately, this meant I was struggling to make my rent. Finally, after a year and a half at CSULB, I was kicked out of school due to low grades. Despite this significant academic setback, Elizabeth never gave up on me. She met consistently with me to go over budgeting, help locate housing, and remind me that I could finish school if I remained consistent. I am happy to report that with her support, I obtained both my associate's degree from Santa Monica College, my bachelor's degree from California State Northridge University, and I am currently in a Master of Social Work program at the University of Southern California. Elizabeth stuck with me after I left my first college, after I became homeless, and despite the consistently bad attitude I presented due to my lack of trust. Through it all, she never gave up even when I was certain college was not for me. She believed, encouraged, and remained kind even during my hardest times. UFC hires more than employees;



they hire individual people who become a fantastic team founded on a passionate belief that youth in foster care can achieve great things. Elizabeth has since attended every college graduation and theater performance and, most recently, my wedding! Although she is no longer a college counselor and has since been promoted to a director position at UFC, she continues to be a significant part of my life's journey.



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Children's Bureau

