

Achieving My Dreams

By Amanda Cherny Reyes

“It is not only financial aid, but support, friendship and life skills that I received from the YES™ program and mentor that helped me succeed.”



Amanda Cherny Reyes, 2009 YES™ Graduate, San José State University

From a very young age, life has been a very long and difficult journey for me. My first encounter with the foster care system was at the age of 5 for about two months. My mother was addicted to drugs and was hardly around, even during the times that she was not incarcerated. My siblings and I were bounced around among her “friends” and “family members” who were also addicts.

I did not know my father and had no other father figure around. At the age of 7, I re-entered the system for the final time until I emancipated out on my own at the age of 18. Before the age of 16, I had already been bounced around from 12 different foster homes, 4 group homes, in and out of the old and new children’s shelters, juvenile hall, and continuously running away and on the streets. Growing up in the system didn’t allow me to know what a normal life was, because I didn’t realize how abnormal mine was. I had no stability, direction, support, love, or what seemed like any purpose in my life.

As I became closer to reaching my 18th birthday, the reality of becoming an adult was starting to set in. I had always known I would love to go to college, but it did not seem like a possibility at the time because I thought it wasn’t people like me that ever went. I really began to focus my time and effort into finishing high school and looking

into attending college. I was connected with the Santa Clara County Independent Living Program and the Bill Wilson Center who then connected me with the SVCF YES™ Program. It is through this connection that my life was really turned around into the right direction. I was no longer alone and I was surrounded by many people who genuinely cared about my life and success. I was provided with access to resources, emotional support, and mentors who were there every step of the way to give me the knowledge and motivation to be successful. Whenever there was a situation, hard time, or crisis that occurred, I could always turn to the YES™ program and my mentors for the support and tools to overcome these obstacles instead of just giving up. I always had someone there to listen, provide feedback and suggestions, and whenever there was good news to share it was a great feeling to be able to share with the same people who care.

Despite all of my disadvantages and obstacles, I am going to graduate on May 23, 2009 with my Bachelor’s Degree in Nursing from San Jose State University. This accomplishment is so amazing because it has been such a never-ending, difficult, and extremely bumpy road to get here. I have achieved my dream of becoming a Critical Care Registered Nurse. I will also be providing my son and daughter with the stability and a very different lifestyle than their mother underwent. I am the first in my family to ever graduate college, and I am now a positive statistic for former foster youth who CAN succeed. The YES™ Program and Bill Wilson Center stepped in at a very crucial time and provided me with the tools and the skills to redirect my life and goals. With all of our hard work and perseverance this graduation was made possible! ✨

About YES™:



Nationwide less than 1% of foster youth graduate from college. YES™ helps foster youth fulfill the dream of obtaining a 2-year/4-year college degree or vocational training.

YES™ provides educational support, connections to mentors and financial scholarships to help foster youth succeed in higher education.