

# Living My Dreams

By Monica Simons

“I have never been happier than I am today because I know that there are opportunities out there for other foster youth who have dreams and goals.”

I had never been more nervous than I was at my graduation. My knees were shaking and my heart was pounding. As my name was called and I walked across that stage, I knew that I had finally made it!

My dream of finishing college and earning my bachelor's degree had finally become a reality. The cheers from the crowd brought a sense of pride that was indescribable. I had done what no one else in my family had accomplished; I earned a 4-years college degree!

Despite my many barriers of frequent moves, financial problems, and some stressful times, I had gotten through it. I can't take all the credit. I was very fortunate to have had a number of people in my life who have helped me through the good times and bad times. At age 16, I met my role model who happened to be my ILP (Independent Living Program) counselor, Darcy Cabral. Darcy was instrumental in helping me get into De Anza College and receive the financial aid I needed to get started. She was always there for me, even if I just needed to talk.

Darcy encouraged me to join the California Youth Connection (CYC), an advocacy group for foster youth. My participation in CYC allowed me to voice my opinion and improve opportunities for foster youth. It also gave me the opportunity to meet people in the community and learn invaluable leadership skills. CYC opened new doors for me because of the people I met. I learned about opportunities for former foster youth that could help me

achieve my dream of going to college and getting the career that I had always wanted.

I was introduced to the YES scholarship a few months before my Fall semester at DeAnza. I don't know if I ever would have finished or even been able to stay at school without YES. The YES staff and partners were there for me through the remaining four years of my college career. They provided support far beyond financial assistance. They were instrumental in helping me become self-sufficient and were with me every step of the way when I achieved major milestones towards my educational goals including transferring from De Anza College to San Jose State University. This was a difficult transition for me because I didn't know if I was ready for a Big University that was unfamiliar



YES™ Scholar Monica Simons and her mentor, Darcy Cabral, at SJSU December 2005 graduation ceremony

and even more challenging. Thanks to the YES staff, ILP, my mentor, and my support network, I made it out of San Jose State with a bachelor's degree in Justice Studies. I am very proud of my accomplishments and grateful to those who helped me along the way. I have never been happier than I am today because I know that there are opportunities out there for other foster youth who have dreams and goals. I have made friends who are not only supportive of my endeavors but care about me as well. In turn, I hope that I can give back to the community and inspire other foster youth to dream and achieve.

I want to thank the entire YES staff and everyone who has ever been there for me (you all know who you are). I couldn't have done it without you! 🌟

## Monica's Advice for Academic Success:

### » Create a Strong Support Network

There are people who want to see you succeed. You need to find them.

### » Ask for Help

Everyone needs support in reaching their goals. Reach out to your teachers, academic counselors and peers.

### » Have a Plan and "OWN" It

Know what your goals are and map out a plan to achieve them. Your academic counselor or mentor can help you find a path, but you need to be in charge of defining your own plan.

### » Have a Plan B

You may run into financial challenges or other temporary road blocks. Don't let this stop you. Look at all your options and use your resources, including your support network, to make the best decision to get back on track.

### » Celebrate Your Success

When you aced a test or successfully finished your first year of college, recognize and acknowledge your successes!

### » Never Give Up!