



DCFS AT WORK

Investing in Los Angeles County families every day

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Mycia Terry
2021 Lane College Graduate
Magna Cum Laude

When she graduated magna cum laude this spring from Lane College, a historically black college located in Jackson, Tennessee, 21-year-old Mycia Terry proved once again that she is unstoppable.

"I know that I want to live a certain way and be able to do certain things," said Mycia, who entered foster care with the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) as a teenager. "When it comes down to it, my motivation is about being able to say that I am stable."

Astute and driven, Mycia is always thinking two steps ahead about what she wants and how to get there. She continues to defy the odds and demonstrates a remarkable ability to achieve her goals, and she credits the support she received while in the child welfare system with helping her chart a path to success.

"To be honest, I was kind of lost when I went to foster care," Mycia said. "My social worker at the time and my foster mom persuaded me to go to a college fair, and it was the best decision I ever made. Now, I'm on a whole new path and I know they helped me get to where I was supposed to be."

DCFS strives to emphasize the importance of education through programming and in the day-to-day interactions with children and youth, finding ways to celebrate both small and big wins along the way. In fact, the department recently hosted the 2021 Virtual Celebration event to recognize nearly 400 youth living in foster care who graduated from high school this summer and are on their way to colleges, universities and vocational schools.

Social worker Monika Jackson from the South County regional office sees Mycia as a perfect example of what youth living in foster care can accomplish with the right guidance and support. Monika became Mycia's social worker three years ago and attributes her success to a wisdom beyond her years and an analytical mind.

"Whatever she chooses to do, Mycia does her research and analyzes everything," Monika said. "Her mind is always processing and thinking ahead."

According to Monika, providing direction and assistance can be challenging when engaging transition-age youth and non-minor dependents, in particular, because they often long for independence from the system. Nonetheless, she has developed her own approach to supporting youth and helping them understand what doors can be opened with educational attainment.

"I show them all the ways DCFS can support them and the resources available," she said. "I do all I can to hold their hand through the process, from taking them to buy books or meet with college

counselors, and assisting them with the application and enrollment process. You just have to be patient, meet them where they are and help them access the resources they need to be successful.”

For Monika, watching youth she has worked with graduate from high school or college is the ultimate reward and the best possible outcome from such efforts.

“It really warms my heart,” she said. “I get so excited for them because I know they set forth a goal, overcame obstacles and worked incredibly hard to reach this point.”

“They may not see or believe it, but I remind them that this is a huge milestone, that I am proud of them and that they do have people here who care and are cheering them on,” she added.

Monika’s warm and open approach over the years have made her a trusted mentor and confidante for Mycia. From the outset, Monika made sure Mycia was comfortable and made herself readily available. Even several states apart, they still see each other every month and speak regularly on the phone and over FaceTime.

“I’m really glad Monika came into my life,” Mycia said. “She helps me with every aspect of my life and has sculpted me into the woman I am now. For a social worker to be able to make you feel like you’re the only case they have is truly special.”

Mycia hopes her story inspires other youth living in foster care to focus on their education, follow their dreams and take advantage of the resources and support available through DCFS and local service providers.



Social worker Monika Jackson at Mycia's college graduation in Tennessee this past April.



“Consistency and dedication are extremely important,” Mycia said, noting that she would tell other foster youth that, “It may seem hard at first, but in the end it’s all worth it.”

For her part, Mycia is already sizing up the road ahead and considering her options, planning to put her newly-minted criminal justice degree to use by working to support youth who are involved with the juvenile justice system.

She is currently pursuing promising career opportunities from various state and local probation and corrections departments that are eager to benefit from her talent, ambition and lived experience.

“It feels great to have graduated,” Mycia said. “Now, I just can’t help but wonder, ‘What’s up next?’ I’m ready to do more!”

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