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For one college grad, family is who she chooses

When 17-year-old new mom Felecia Hubbard met Social Worker Jennie Feria in 1999, neither one of them could have imagined they'd become family over the course of 25 years.

This past Mother's Day weekend, Jennie — now DCFS chief deputy director — proudly watched as Felecia accepted her bachelor's degree from California State University, East Bay.

When the two first met, Felecia was grappling with familial instability, and Jennie was a fairly new social worker tasked with providing support to 60 young people and their parents.

Born in Gardena and raised in Watts, Felecia's journey was marked by numerous obstacles. She entered foster care before she began storing memories, living with her grandmother from ages 3 to 11. She spent the next four years between foster homes, residential facilities and group homes. When she was 15, Felecia was taken in by one aunt. Later, when she was 17 and pregnant, another aunt took her in. Neither relative treated her kindly.

Jennie's introduction into Felecia's life proved transformational, empowering Felecia to navigate the hurdles in her life and pursue her aspirations.

"[Jennie] gave me all the strategies and tools to get transitional housing and get my grown-up life together," Felecia recalled. "The trajectory of my life has been so difficult. There's been alienation and isolation, mental health [issues] and drug abuse ... I didn't want to have another child, *my son*, endure what I did."

Jennie still vividly recalls those initial interactions. “[Felecia has] always been very resourceful and willing to put herself out there,” she noted.

Despite encountering setbacks along the way, Felecia made a pivotal decision to turn her life around. At the age of 30, she enrolled in El Camino Community College, earning an associate degree in 2016. Her graduation last month was a momentous occasion, the culmination of years of resilience and determination. As Felecia contemplates the future, she is resolute in her commitment to making a positive impact in the lives of others.

“I have never just wanted to be a foster youth statistic,” she emphasized, underscoring her professional desire to support vulnerable communities through roles in adoption, foster care or elder care.

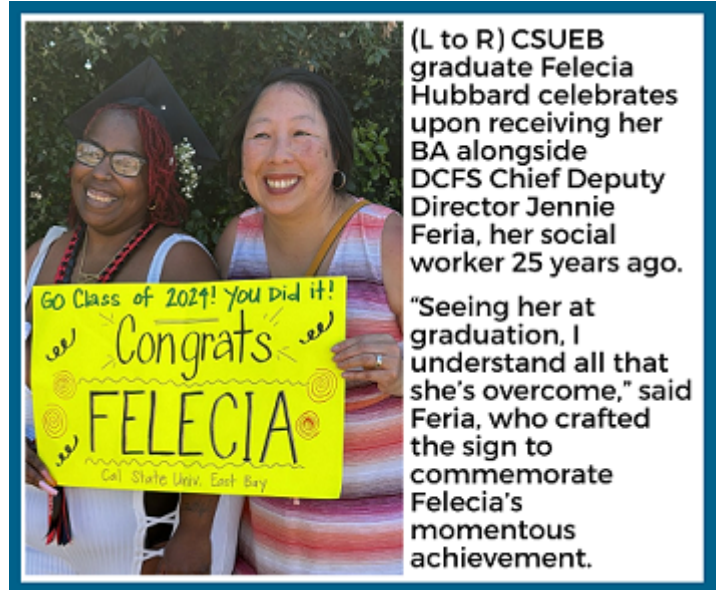
And while she’s proud of what she’s accomplished and hopeful for the future, Felecia’s greatest pride remains her son, Ramirez Brown, now 25 years old and using his voice to advocate for LGBTQ+ and HIV-positive populations.

“I feel God gave me the correct human being to share this life with,” Felecia said. “My focus in life was to not let him go through anything I went through. That meant giving him a voice. And he has used the positives and negatives of his childhood to dictate the positive of every aspect of his life.”

In a heartfelt letter preceding her graduation, Felecia expressed profound gratitude for Jennie, writing: “Thank you for looking out for me all these years. I consider you family and a good friend. You have been my motivation to become more than a foster youth. You are my favorite person.”

For Jennie, becoming part of Felecia’s chosen family is like hitting the jackpot. Their enduring connection is a gift and privilege in the world of social work, where it can be difficult to maintain long-term contact once a young person exits foster care. Bearing witness to Felecia’s transformation has also been a source of inspiration for the lifelong social worker, whose sense of purpose has only been fortified by Felecia over the years.

“It’s ultimately what you aspire to do, to impact people in this way,” she said.



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