

Bryanna Ageday was always a good student and a fast learner, but she struggled in high school. Being in foster care made it hard for her to focus, and prevented her from being her best self.

*“I lacked motivation,” Bryanna said. “I had to learn how to mentally support myself. I had so much around me that should have inspired me, but I didn’t yet have the interest.”*

Bryanna was in 8<sup>th</sup> grade when she left her father’s home to stay with her maternal aunt for about six months. After that, just as she was about to enter 9<sup>th</sup> grade, she entered her first foster home. Bryanna felt supported in terms of academics, but there was little emotional support of the kind Bryanna needed and sought.

Her first foster mother soon passed away from brain cancer. Bryanna transitioned to another foster home but didn’t feel safe there, so she moved back in with her father. It was a difficult decision, reflecting her conflicted feelings about foster care.

*“I don’t know why I made that decision but I’m happy I did. It’s actually pretty intense when you go from being at home to foster care with strangers, and then back home again. The dynamics of relationships change, and it takes time. I’m not saying foster care is the worst thing, but it does cause challenging relationships with family.”*

Bryanna’s struggles in high school led her to Wildcat’s STEPS (Striving Towards Engagement and Positive Solutions) Transformative Mentoring Program, for youth who are at risk of involvement with the criminal justice system. While at STEPS, Bryanna developed confidence, and learned how to advocate for herself. She acquired administrative skills, and received job readiness training in areas like how to be professional in a work environment, and how to engage in productive communication with colleagues.

A subsequent transitional job as an Administrative Assistant with ReServe allowed Bryanna to put all she had learned into practice. *“I learned how to adjust to new situations, and that even if things do go the way I would like them to there is always a resolution. Work taught me to be accountable to myself, to admit it if something goes wrong and to fix it. I learned how to separate what is going on with me personally from with what is going on in the work environment. I learned that I can achieve whatever I want to, and that I can take whatever action I need to be headed for greatness.”*

Support and mentoring, long with Bryanna’s hard work and soul-searching, has paid off. In February, 2021 she received her high school diploma, and in August began classes as a fulltime student at NYC College of Technology. Bryanna is majoring in health science and maintaining a high GPA. She plans to transfer to the college’s nursing program—an important step on her path to realize her dream of becoming a pediatrician.

Working fulltime and being a fulltime student means Bryanna is a very busy young woman, with a very bright future. Reflecting on her journey, Bryanna has some words for other young people in foster care who are struggling and seeking direction.

*"The best thing you can do is remain self-motivated. Even though things happen you can always move forward and push past it, and see it as another opportunity to grow. Everything in life is a choice. Remain intact with yourself, not with the distractions around you. Let school and self-motivation be your positive distractions, and push forward."*