

‘I Found My Purpose’:

Brooke W.’s Journey from Foster Care to College and the Impact of Ohio Reach

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Despite an uncertain journey, Brooke W.’s ambition and perseverance have propelled her toward success as a recent University of Cincinnati graduate. With the support of Ohio Reach and a strong community behind her, she is building a future dedicated to creating positive change.

As a Cincinnati native, she grew up living with her grandmother in Bond Hill. Brooke’s life shifted dramatically at 16 when the loss of her grandmother led to her placement in foster care. She transitioned into independent living six months before her 18th birthday and later emancipated at 21 years old. During this time, she decided to enroll in a bachelor’s program for Urban Studies at the University of Cincinnati.

Recounting highlights of her undergraduate experience, Brooke shared, “I found my purpose. Whether it’s youth advocacy or mental health advocacy, I knew I wanted to do community-centered things that impact other people...”

Post emancipation, Brooke faced multiple challenges, including financial instability and a period of homelessness. She credits key moments of support with helping her move forward.

After more than a week of living in her car, it was a high school resource officer who recognized what she was going through and took action. “Nobody knew because I was just so used to being disappointed... He remembered me... He called some resources, and they got me in a hotel immediately.”

With the guidance of people committed to empowering foster care-connected youth, Brooke was introduced to Ohio Reach—a program that helped her access the resources she needed to succeed in college and beyond.

Throughout her educational journey, Brooke recalls that unexpected and difficult barriers would arise. In these unfortunate instances, Ohio Reach was able to step in, assist her in

moving forward, and help her continue to work towards her dreams.

When reflecting on Ohio Reach's impact on her educational career, Brooke stated, "Sometimes you just need that extra \$500...Even in times when I did not financially plan right or in some unforeseen financial circumstances, they were able to step in and assist. Like recently, I put in a request for my laptop to get fixed... [Ohio Reach] being able to help with that is huge."

Today, Brooke is preparing to pursue the Master of Community Planning program and obtain her real estate certificate at the University of Cincinnati. Despite initially being told that full funding was unlikely, she was awarded a full-ride scholarship – earned through her academic excellence, campus involvement, and unwavering determination.

Brooke is now focused on building the future she once only imagined. She reflected, "I want to continue to grow, learn, and refine my skills...I see the potential in myself, and I see that I can be better." She went on to say, "I'm in this phase where I am letting things fall together. I've seen it happen so many times in my life."

Through every setback and success, Ohio Reach was more than just a financial resource – it was a lifeline. It was a steady reminder that she was not alone and that her goals were within reach. With her extraordinary resilience and a supportive community, Brooke's journey stands as a powerful testament to what's possible when we invest in students and believe in their futures.