

# VICTORIA

## STUDENT FINDS GRACE AT THE NEIGHBORHOOD PLACE

Victoria has one semester left until she graduates from high school, but it's been a long and winding road getting to this point.

"My dad died when I was 14 and I rapidly went downhill. His family totally cut us off—my mom, my four siblings and 11 nieces and nephews. I turned to self-harm and drugs. I pushed people away. I even pushed my mom away. It was hard to get out, but the people at the Neighborhood Place were there for me when I wasn't even there for myself."

Family Service Association, and its Neighborhood Place location, is a trusted partner in United Way's Successful Students Impact Council, which focuses on ensuring that all young people are actively engaged in their communities, prepared for the 21st Century workforce and have resource-rich environments with prepared and engaged adults to support them in reaching their full potential.

**"THE PEOPLE AT THE NEIGHBORHOOD PLACE WERE THERE FOR ME WHEN I WASN'T EVEN THERE FOR MYSELF."**

"I have a better relationship now with my mom. We're beginning to trust each other again. But I had an amazing relationship with my dad. He was always there for me. I have no bad memories of him. He worked hard in construction in the oil fields to support us. Even when he was sick with cancer, we did stuff."

Struggling to cope with his illness, Victoria turned to drugs and was in the hospital when he died.

"I didn't get to say goodbye."



**“I CAN BE MYSELF, INTERACT, BE ARTSY, BE THE GEEK THAT I AM WITHOUT BEING BULLIED.”**

“When he died, I was on a downward slope—depression, drugs, self-harm. People said, ‘oh you’ll get over it. It’s just a phase. You haven’t lived long enough to go through real struggles.’ That made no sense to me that as a kid, I couldn’t experience things.”

Many students do not have stable environments conducive to learning, and there is a growing number who do not have engaged adults supporting them to reach their full potential—preparing them for college, a career or life.

**“IT’S IMPORTANT TO PROVE TO MYSELF THAT I AM BETTER THAN I THINK I AM—OR WAS.”**

“You have to find your people.

I have been going to the Neighborhood Place after school since I was 13. My feet are my transportation, and they know to come here. So many people don’t have anywhere to go. Here, you can be whoever you want to be. No judgement. I can be myself, interact, be artsy, be the geek that I am without being bullied.

I am a first-generation high school graduate in my entire family. It’s important to prove to myself that I am better than I think I am—or was.

My grandparents and parents came from nothing, but they are the strongest people of know. Both my parents were incarcerated, and there were low expectations that ‘you will be, too.’ Finding good role models through United Way and Family Service Association inspired me. Someone telling me they believe in me means everything. I honestly would not be here without them.”

The Neighborhood Place provides counseling, child abuse prevention, parent engagement, case management, early childhood education, senior services, financial literacy and empowerment, workforce readiness, GED/ESL classes, youth services and a teen technology center.



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