



KIARA

A SAFE ENVIRONMENT TO THRIVE

As long as she can remember, Kiara has been on her own despite being the oldest child of seven.

When Kiara was placed into foster care with her siblings, she was understandably scared. Only 12 years old at the time, Kiara had been used to living in an unfit home when she arrived at Boysville. One of United Way of San Antonio and Bexar County's Impact Partners, Boysville provides trauma-informed care for children and caregivers affected by abuse, neglect and family crisis.

At first, Kiara did not think she would be there long. "In the beginning, I thought I would just stick it out and wait to go home," she says. After being placed in the residential program, Kiara started seeing all the benefits of her new home.

This was the first time she had her own room and her own bed. She could finally count on having three meals available to her each day. Not having to worry about food, shelter or clothes lifted a burden off of her shoulders.

A self-confessed "rebellious" kid, Kiara's grades in school improved after this life-changing transition. "At the time, I was only passing PE and theater arts." Kiara describes herself as a "not so great" student up until then. She was finally able to get glasses and soon after became an A/B honor roll student.

Today, she credits the staff at Boysville for teaching her how to focus on her studies and how to set goals. Kiara would go on to graduate from high school with honors and be inducted into the National Honor Society.

A natural athlete, the nurturing and stable environment Kiara now had enabled her to excel in sports. After playing soccer and basketball, Kiara discovered her passion for track. Her success was not isolated to the classroom, as she would set her high school's record for the best long jump at 19 feet, 3 ½ inches. Kiara's track team would win several state championships and her talent on the field would earn her a track scholarship at the University of North Texas.

Adjusting to her new life and graduating high school with honors isn't where Kiara's story ends. She had to deal with a second monumental life change at 18: Figuring out how to balance college classes with her newfound freedom as an adult.



[Supervised Independent Living]
helped me in every aspect of **getting**
my priorities straight.

Like many young people in their first year of college, Kiara's priorities changed when she went to the University of North Texas. She ended up on academic probation and eventually returned to Boysville.

It was then that Kiara was placed in the Supervised Independent Living (SIL) Program, a service designed to help young adults adjust to life on their own after leaving foster care. One of only nine programs like this in Texas and the only one in San Antonio, SIL provides housing and financial assistance.

"Coming back to the SIL program was the biggest blessing for me," Kiara says. "SIL taught me how to budget, cook and prioritize my goals. They helped me in every aspect of getting my priorities straight."

Kiara would more than get her priorities in order. Faced again with a challenge that many would turn away from, she went to community college and brought her grades up. She would then transfer to Texas A&M-Corpus Christi, where she would become a walk-on for the track team.

"I learned to be a student first before being an athlete," Kiara says of this time in her life.



**I knew that I was *always safe*.
That gave me a sense of comfort
because I knew nothing was going
to happen to me.**

In May 2022, Kiara graduated from Texas A&M-Corpus Christi with her B.A. in Media Production.

"I don't think I would have gone to college without them. They gave me many opportunities and blessings, I am grateful."

United Way of San Antonio and Bexar County invests in programs that stabilize people



through emergency and disaster care services. In times of crisis, meeting a person's most immediate needs is the main priority. After that, helping them get back on track in a stable environment where they can reach their full potential is critical.

"When you donate to United Way, you are helping youth like me find a safe place to call home," Kiara says. "I wouldn't be where I am today without the support of Boysville and the United Way. I knew that I was always safe. That gave me a sense of comfort because I knew nothing was going to happen to me."

For now, Kiara is concentrating on her first job as a college graduate. She plans to also focus on developing her music career and is looking to find a job in media production. A decade after experiencing a life-changing crisis and entering foster care, Kiara is now a thriving young adult after being given the tools that she needed to reach her potential.

Now a college graduate, Kiara is heading toward a bright, successful future. When she looks back on her life so far, Kiara is amazed at what she has been able to do and what she's overcome.

"For me to come this far, and feel like I have been through so much,... it's a big accomplishment."

To learn more about United Way of San Antonio and Bexar County's work and to hear more stories, visit uwsatx.org.