

CalWORKs Student Turned Employee Inspires Others to be Successful



When new students come into the CalWORKS office to apply for benefits to help them succeed in college, there could be no better person to empathize with them than Sheiba Boissiere.

In 2008 Sheiba was pregnant and in a drug treatment facility program, and she saw no way out. Then her son came along, and it changed her life.

“Damarcus was born with breathing difficulties and had to be on life support for two months,” says Sheiba, with tears in her eyes. “He was my miracle of joy, and I began a whole new life because of him.”

It was later at a residential facility that that one of the counselors recommended that she start college at Merritt. “She said it would be the perfect place for me,” says Sheiba, “up in the hills where I could have choices and dream big about a bright future.”

That counselor would be one of several mentors throughout the next five years who would help Sheiba, starting with a friend who led her to the CalWORKs office where she met counselor Claire Crosetti. Claire saw something special in the CalWORKs recipient and hired her as a student worker and subsequently as a full-time clerical assistant.

“Sheiba is a dedicated worker who is passionate and effective in helping the single parents on welfare in our program,” wrote Claire, when she recommended Sheiba for a profile in *The Merritt Connection*. “She does a beautiful job of supporting our students while upholding the integrity of the program.”

Damarcus is now a healthy 7-year-old, and Sheiba strives to make him proud of her. She accomplished that in 2013 by graduating with six associate degrees which she hopes to use to become an entrepreneur to help others who may be in a difficult situation like hers. For now, she loves her job, which she says inspires her every day.

“The CalWORKs program has allowed me to become an advocate for others, to understand their situations, and to shine a light on them,” says Sheiba. “My message to them is, ‘When you have struggles, you need to keep moving forward. The reward will be much greater than you’ll ever expect.’”

—*Susan May*