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SBVC HELPS STUDENTS SUCCEED WITH CALWORKS

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LaToya Scott may have been a late bloomer, but once she started on her academic journey at San Bernardino Valley College, she didn't look back and gave it her all to succeed.

As a single mom, Scott was facing many stressful personal obstacles. She reached out for help at the campus CalWORKs office.

"All the ladies in the office were very supportive with helping me navigate Valley College," she said. "They're amazing, they're awesome."

Through a variety of programs, mentors, and office guidance, she landed a job and was able to get financial aid plus keep all of her TANF allowance benefits. It helped her stay focused on the most important part of her life – taking care of her then-infant daughter.

Last spring, Scott graduated with full honors, having earned an AA in Human Services Case Management in the Public Sector, an AA in Liberal Arts Behavioral and Social Sciences, along with a certificate for Human Services Case Management.

She admits it was all a bit scary at first.

She wondered if she would be the oldest person in class. She worried whether she could retain the information. She hadn't been in a classroom in 16 years, having dropped out in her senior high school year to help care for her grandparents, who raised her.

But when she was 32, both grandparents died two months apart. She knew she had to work hard and fast.

"Life became real for me. I felt like I didn't have anything to fall back on," she said. "I didn't want to fail my daughter."

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Undaunted, she completed her GED in seven weeks. Soon after, she started at SBVC and began working at the San Bernardino Community College District in fiscal and business services.

Through the CalWORKs department, which she describes as a lifesaver, she received all the tools she needed to move ahead, including childcare. At one point, she was chosen to head up a workshop to educate other parents at her daughter's learning center about how they could also access educational tools and flourish.

The CalWORKs campus office was accessible, and a truly judgment-free zone, she added. It helped her realize that there was life after public assistance. She said their doors were always open and guidance there for the asking.

"[It's like] you're on the county, but we're going to help you stop this generational poverty. We're going to help you get off the system to show your child and show your family that there is life after the system," she said.

Scott also served an 18-month internship at the award-winning nonprofit Time for Change Foundation.

Most of all, her overall experience helped her to achieve all of her personal goals for her daughter, now four years old, who attended her graduation last spring.

Today, Scott is no longer on county assistance. Valley College programming gave her the confidence to move ahead through their workshops and classes. Going forward, she is also considering pursuing her bachelor's degree.

This month, she starts as an eligibility worker with the County of San Bernardino.

"I'm really excited that I did all of this," she said. "I have a child to provide for."

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