



# THE AMERICAN DREAM PROGRAM:

Helping Youth in Foster Care Break Through to Success



# THE HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN DREAM PROGRAM: MAKING DREAMS COME TRUE FOR YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE

**1997**

▶ St. Vincent's Services launches the American Dream Program (ADP), privately funded through the support of generous donors, to help foster care youth overcome their personal challenges and achieve educational and vocational success.



**1997-2009**

▶ 70 young people in foster care admitted into the ADP program, which provided them with a place to live, onsite counseling and emotional support, tuition and other educational expenses over their entire college careers, well beyond their time in foster care.

ADP graduates are alumni of some of our nation's most prestigious schools, including Amherst, Middlebury and Brown. ADP alumni have earned graduate degrees in law, medicine and finance and followed their passions to the Culinary Institute of America and New York City Technology College.



**2009**

▶ Philliber Research Associates report found that ADP is effective in preparing foster care youth for success. ADP expanded the services offered to provide support to high school aged foster kids, including assessments, academic plans, tutoring and standardized test preparation.



**2013**

▶ American Dream Program shifts from a residential to a community-based program where young people continue to receive support for education and related expenses.



**2014**

▶ Following an affiliation agreement, St. Vincent's Services becomes HeartShare St. Vincent's Services, combining two organizations each with over a century of dedication to helping New York City's most needy children and families.



**2015**

▶ HeartShare St. Vincent's Services launches a newly revamped American Dream Program, building upon the program's success and history to provide, in addition to their educational needs, support for the financial, emotional and employment needs of youth in foster care.



**The revamped American Dream Program's goal is to triple the number of youth served within the next three years.**

# THE AMERICAN DREAM PROGRAM: HELPING FOSTER CARE YOUTH BREAK THROUGH TO SUCCESS.

Our youth dream about becoming a lawyer, a career in technology, managing a hotel or owning a business. And while their individual dreams differ, the desire to do something great—to rise above the challenges that life has put in their way—remains the same. They dream of breaking through.

HeartShare St. Vincent's Services (HSVS) is determined that older youth leaving foster care get the help they need to achieve their dreams. The American Dream Program is a comprehensive education, emotional support and career advancement program that empowers older youth to overcome their personal challenges and excel as adults. The program helps them find their own path, make a plan, and develop the skills they need to take on the challenges of work, education, finances and adult responsibilities with energy and confidence.

## An American Dream Program Success Story



**Mamadou D., Senior, New York University**

“Education, to me, is the key to success because you will always have the knowledge and nobody can take that from you.”

Mamadou came to America with his family when he was 15. When his parents returned to Senegal, it was decided that he would move to New York to live with his aunt to go to school. A year later, due to a green card scam, Mamadou's aunt was denied re-entry to the U.S. after a visit to Africa. This left him alone, with no money, no food, no family and almost no shelter. After telling his soccer coach about his problems, Mamadou arrived at St. Vincent's Jamaica Hills Group Home. St. Vincent's did not just provide a roof over his head, food on the table and clothes on his back. St. Vincent's challenged Mamadou to dream out loud.

Thanks to the American Dream Program, Mamadou went on to earn his Associates' degree in civil engineering at the New York City College of Technology and will earn his bachelor's degree in civil engineering in 2015 from New York University's Polytechnic School of Engineering. He currently has an internship with Turner Construction, an international construction services company which counts Madison Square Garden, JFK Terminal 5 expansion and the New York Times Headquarters among its projects.

# **BECOMING A SUCCESSFUL ADULT ISN'T EASY. WITHOUT HELP, IT MAY NEVER HAPPEN.**

For all teenagers, the transition to adulthood is a gradual process that can extend into the mid-to late twenties. Foster care youth simply do not receive enough support and guidance to help them navigate the intricacies of adulthood. And without that support, their prospects are bleak.

“Time and again, we’ve seen that a long-term connection with a supportive adult can make all the difference”

–Dawn Saffayeh, Executive Director, HSVS

# FOSTER YOUTH NEED YOUR HELP TO BEAT THE CONCRETE CHALLENGES THEY FACE AS YOUNG ADULTS



**Homelessness:** 15% of foster youth surveyed reported an episode of homelessness. More than 54% of these reported being homeless for more than one week.



**Incarceration:** 59% of young women surveyed had been arrested, almost 30% had been convicted of a crime. For young men, 82% had been arrested and 58% had been convicted of a crime.



**Teen pregnancy:** 1/3 of young women surveyed reported being pregnant before age 18.



**Unemployment:** Only 46% of youth surveyed reported being "currently employed." 54% of youth surveyed reported annual income from employment of \$10,000 or less.



**Education:** 20% of the foster youth surveyed had no high school diploma or GED. 4% had received a degree from a 2-year college and just 3% had received a degree from a 4-year college.

Source: Courtney, M., Dworsky, A., Brown, A., Cary, C., Love, K., & Vorhies, V. (2011). *Midwest evaluation of the adult functioning of former foster youth: Outcomes at age 26*. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.

# YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE CAN BEAT THE ODDS AND REALIZE THEIR DREAMS.

The current statistics are troubling, but the training, the support, and the opportunities that the American Dream Program provides can change the lives of our youth and reverse this trend. HeartShare St. Vincent's Services is deeply committed to giving our youth everything they need to become successful adults. That means replicating the resources, support and opportunities that many non-foster care teenagers enjoy in the areas critical to their transitions to adulthood. To help them meet their personal, educational, and career goals, we have identified the four roots of adult success.

## An American Dream Program Success Story



**Crystalann R., Class of 2014, CUNY John Jay College of Criminal Justice**

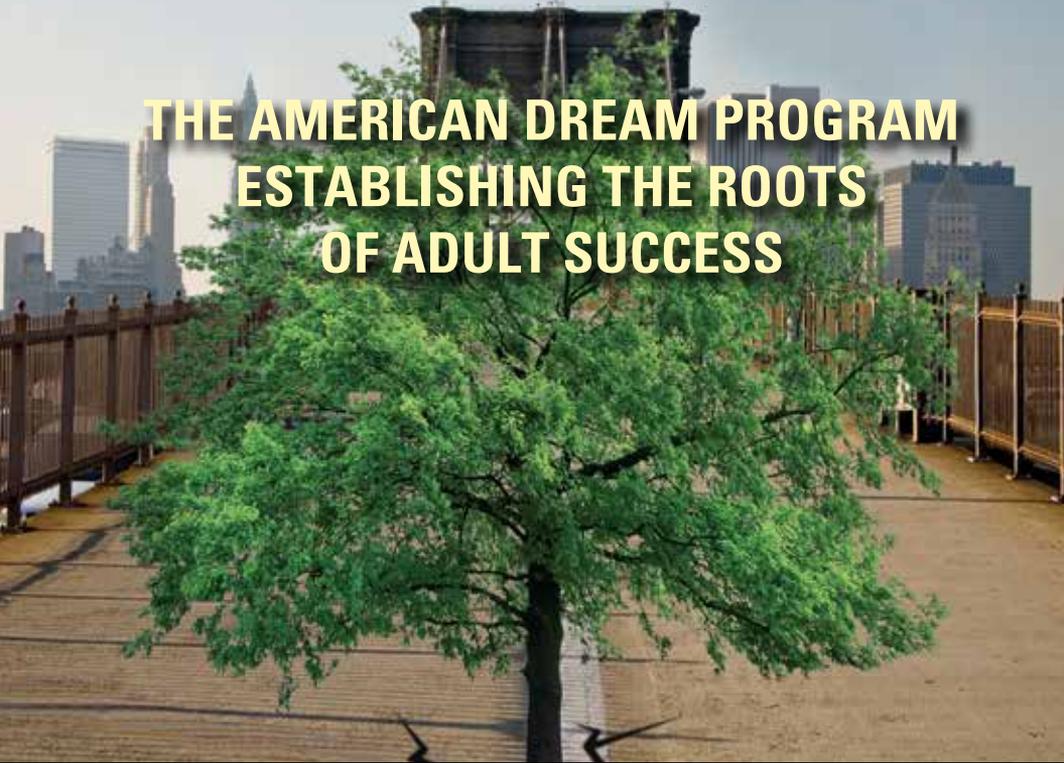
**“Where you’re from does not determine where you go.”**

Crystalann entered foster care in 1997 when she was 6 years old. For the next several years, she was moved to a variety of different foster homes with hopes of finding the right fit, but to no avail. Her paternal grandmother started the adoption process in 2003, but the adoption fell through a few years later. Crystalann was 16 by this time and her foster care plan switched to independent living. In 2011, she signed the lease on her first apartment in addition to starting her undergraduate studies.

With help from the American Dream Program, Crystalann graduated from John Jay College of Criminal Justice with a degree in forensic psychology in 2014. Two weeks after graduation, she was offered a position as a senior research support specialist at the world-renowned Neurodynamics Lab at SUNY Downstate Medical Center, studying the novel phenotypes for the genetic analysis of alcoholism and substance abuse. Her plan is to continue her education and will be applying for clinical neuropsychology and behavioral neuroscience PhD programs for fall 2015.

**“No one is worth giving up on. Everyone has potential.”**

**– Jason Brunner, Youth Advocate, HSVS**



# THE AMERICAN DREAM PROGRAM ESTABLISHING THE ROOTS OF ADULT SUCCESS



## EDUCATION

Without strong literacy skills and educational support, many doors will stay closed to young adults as they look to further their education or vocational training. Assessment, tutoring, application support and scholarships help youth take their education to the next level.

## EMPLOYMENT ACHIEVEMENT

The American Dream Program prepares youth to enter the world of work and be successful. Through individualized and group coaching, internships and job placement support, young adults learn the skills that will help them launch their careers.

## EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

Developing networks is a key skill to adult success. But without strong adult connections to guide them through new challenges, foster youth are at a significant disadvantage. The American Dream Program closes that gap with a program that pairs supportive adults with youth aging out of foster care.

## FINANCIAL LITERACY

Youth aging out of foster care typically do not have experience managing money. In fact, many leave care without basic financial management skills. The American Dream Program changes that with a comprehensive financial education that includes in-house workshops and savings incentive programs.

# WE ALL BENEFIT WHEN THEY BREAK THROUGH.

The cost of doing nothing to help foster care youth transition into adulthood is staggering. Conversely, for every youth we help to realize their potential and become successful adults, we can save hundreds of thousands of dollars for the community and society. That's the kind of long-term impact the American Dream Program was created to make.

The Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Project estimates **that the average cost to society of each young person who ages out of foster care is \$300,000.**

# THE AMERICAN DREAM PROGRAM FEATURES:

## EDUCATION

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- **Tutoring**  
Initial and ongoing literacy assessments, along with customized tutoring, prepare our youth for academic success.
- **GED Programming**  
Along with GED preparation, post-secondary test and application guidance is available to support our youths' educational goals.
- **American Dream Scholarship Program**  
This established program provides tuition and other financial assistance to youth ready to pursue their education and skill development training—in college, or with vocational and certificate programs.

## EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

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- **Permanency Pacts**  
A Permanency Pact creates a formalized, facilitated process to connect youth in foster care with an adult who's pledged to offer lifelong friendship, professional guidance and emotional support.
- **Youth Advocates**  
Youth Advocates are the link between the voice of youth and the voice of an adult figure. Advocates, all of whom have been in foster care, provide experience-based knowledge and support directly to the youth, helping them overcome specific challenges and take advantage of opportunities.

## EMPLOYMENT ACHIEVEMENT

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- **Career Coaching**  
Career education workshops and individualized coaching are offered to help youth identify their personal and professional goals and teach them how to prepare and present themselves to potential employers.
- **Internships**  
The American Dream Program works with local and corporate sponsors to provide both paid and unpaid internship opportunities.
- **Job Placement**  
We have partnered with a premier workforce agency in New York City to help young adults get ready for work, and find jobs that match their interests and strengths.

## FINANCIAL LITERACY

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- **Financial Literacy Program**  
A series of in-house workshops for former and current foster youth help them gain critical financial management skills—including banking, budgeting, credit management and debt management.
- **Savings Incentive Program**  
To encourage financial planning and provide a financial safety net, the American Dream Program will match, up to a certain limit, savings contributions made by young people in care who complete the Financial Literacy Program.

# HOW TO HELP OR GET INVOLVED

Opportunities abound for both individuals and corporations to become involved in the American Dream Program.

- **Individual Donations:** The program is funded by generous contributions from a wide array of donors. We accept donations in any amount and can also work with you to arrange for multi-year giving. In addition, many companies match employee contributions to causes such as the American Dream Program, which can be an easy way to double the impact of your donation. 100% of the donations directly support the youth.
- **Permanency Pacts:** Individuals interested in becoming more deeply involved in the lives of our youth, can enter into Permanency Pacts that match them with youth currently in the program. This can be an incredibly rewarding personal experience, allowing a supportive adult to play an important role in providing emotional support, as well as life and career guidance, to a young person.
- **Corporate Sponsorships:** Corporations can also donate directly to the American Dream Program. We can design a sponsorship package best aligned with your corporate charitable giving to help demonstrate movement toward your corporate social responsibility objectives.
- **Corporate Internships and Employment Opportunities:** Programmatic support from corporations, in addition to sponsorships, is also welcomed. The American Dream Program is particularly interested in co-creating internships and employment opportunities for our participants with companies in all industries.

## CONTACT INFO:

If you are interested in learning more about the American Dream Program and how you can help, please contact:

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## An American Dream Program Success Story



**Dylan T., Freshman, LaGuardia  
Community College**

“I always try to see the best out of everything because I know that even though I have a dark past, that’s not something that I’m going to live in forever. I always push towards my dreams, my desires. I always look at what I’ve already accomplished and I feel like I’ve gotten this far, so there is no limit.”

Throughout her childhood, Dylan experienced child neglect and physical abuse on a consistent basis. The one person she thought would always protect her, hurt her. January 29, 2009 was one of the worst days of her life. She was taken away from her family and she and her siblings were separated from each other within less than six months of being placed in foster care. She was placed in any home that was available, and was not compatible with many of the foster parents in those homes.

The lack of communication and emotional support in those homes led her to develop an independent mindset. She became a proactive individual throughout high school by participating in various extra curricular activities. Through the American Dream Program, Dylan entered LaGuardia Community College as a freshman in the fall of 2014. She aspires to become a defense attorney, helping people whose rights have been violated.

