

OHLONE COLLEGE CalWORKs

# Portraits of Success



MY FIRST YEAR OF COLLEGE WAS A CHALLENGE, The CalWORKs staff at Ohlone helped me realize My life took a different BECAUSE I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT TO EXPECT, that there were doors open to me... direction then I first had planned. Thank you Ohlone College CalWORKs for changing my life! SINCE BEGINNING MY JOURNEY AT OHLONE With financial help I have received I am able to complete my education. I HAVE GROWN... I HAD TO LEARN TO JUMP OVER MY HURDLES...

# Dear Friends and Family

of the Ohlone College CalWORKs Program,

**IT'S FINALLY HERE!** The very first Ohlone College CalWORKs Portraits of Success! I'm very pleased and excited to share with you the uplifting stories of the young women that I have grown to know and love. Their stories will touch and inspire you.

I've had the pleasure of getting to know each one of these beautiful women on a personal level and each one of them has overcome such horrific obstacles. Yet when you look into their eyes you see hope for their future and for the future of their children. They are not typical students; first and foremost, they are mothers. They are mothers who work harder and sacrifice more as they strive to make themselves better so they can provide the very best for their children. They are amazing!

It is both a privilege and an honor to serve them. Usually the teacher inspires the students but in this case it is the students who have inspired me. Now, grab a cup of tea and a box of tissues, then sit back and relax as you allow each story to touch your heart.

Thank you,

*Shawna Luce*

Ohlone College CalWORKs Program Coordinator

**Weeping may endure for the night...but JOY comes in the morning!**

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IT IS STILL HARD FOR ME TO BELIEVE HOW FAR I HAVE COME, BUT I AM GRATEFUL. who can overcome obstacles.

The CalWORKs Program at Ohlone College strives to work closely with the staff members of the Social Services Agency; we are not funded through the county. Our purpose is to help students who are receiving cash assistance from the county to be successful in achieving their educational goals.

The mission of the CalWORKs staff is to provide quality service and assist students receiving cash aid (TANF) from the Social Services Agency.

**WE DEMONSTRATE OUR COMMITMENT** to assisting students by providing supportive services that help students achieve their educational and career goals.

**WE SERVE AS ADVOCATES FOR** CalWORKs students by openly communicating with their case managers.

**WE RECOGNIZE AND APPRECIATE** the socio-economic and cultural diversity of our student population. The Ohlone College CalWORKs Program exemplifies service, innovation and leadership.

## What is CalWORKs?

California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids is the state's welfare program for families with children. CalWORKs replaced the former AFDC program in January 1998.

CalWORKs funds assist single parents who are receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and those in transition from welfare to achieve long-term self-sufficiency through coordinated student services.

## What can the CalWORKs Program at Ohlone College do for me?

The CalWORKs Program supports eligible students in obtaining their educational degrees and certificates and is available to help students meet their Department of Social Services requirements quickly and effectively by providing the following services:

- Educational training programs
- Work Study assignment paid jobs that don't affect cash assistance
- Communication between the Department of Public Social Service (DPSS) about a student's needs, requests and requirements
- Helpful information on welfare reform and government requirements

Referrals to other departments on campus such as:

- Disabled Services (DSPS)
- Extended Opportunity Programs and Services (EOPS)
- Cooperative Agencies Resources for Education (CARE)
- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families – Child Development Careers (TANF-CDC)

## For more information:

Ohlone College CalWORKs  
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Fremont, CA 94539-5847  
510-659-6152  
[www.ohlone.edu/go/calworks](http://www.ohlone.edu/go/calworks)

# Lora Williams

Ohlone College Graduate, Former CalWORKs Program Peer Mentor

Currently Attending UC Berkeley ■ AMERICAN STUDIES MAJOR

**I GREW UP IN A FAMILY WHERE COLLEGE WAS NEVER TALKED ABOUT.** My older brother was the first one in our family to graduate high school and he went into the military immediately after. I dropped out of high school at the end of my sophomore year and I felt like no one in my family even noticed. It seemed normal, what everybody did.

I had two children by the time I was 18 and had married their father. He was verbally and physically abusive. He always tried to prevent me from doing anything that could improve my life or help me gain confidence. I left him shortly after we were married and was on my own with my kids.

I had no job, no education, and no idea what to do. I could not afford to put my kids in daycare so

I went to my mother for help. She agreed to watch them at night so I could work. I spent the next four years working low-paying, risky, night-time jobs in places like pool halls and bars and it was really hard. I had to work all night and be up all day with the kids. I never had anytime to sleep. I was always exhausted.

When I was 22 I decided to go back to school. I got my GED and went to De Anza Community College in Cupertino. My mother tried to convince me to apply for CalWORKs, but I kept saying no. In my mind I was embarrassed to be on welfare. I felt like people already judged me for having my kids so young, I didn't want to give anyone the satisfaction of saying that I couldn't take care of them by myself. I soon found out however that going to school, taking care of the kids, and working nights wasn't going to work.

My first semester in college didn't go very well. I registered for four classes and only passed one. I dropped one class and failed the other two. I got really discouraged. I came back the following semester and registered for three classes, but I ended up dropping all of them. I felt like I couldn't handle it all, there just weren't enough hours in the day for everything.

I began dating my current boyfriend a few months later and he helped me realize that CalWORKs really could help. If I went on welfare, then I could quit working temporarily and only focus on my kids and school. I swallowed my

pride and applied. It was the best decision I have ever made. I didn't have to work nights anymore and I was able to spend more time with my kids. I wasn't exhausted everyday and I became a new person.

I transferred to Ohlone Community College in Fremont. I started at Ohlone intending to get my Associate's Degree and then go back to work. The thought of transferring to a four-year college never even occurred to me. My second semester at Ohlone I went to the CalWORKs office on campus and applied for their program. This was the second best decision I have ever made.

The CalWORKs staff at Ohlone helped me realize that there were doors open to me that I had never even heard of, I just had to find them. I walked into their office alone, scared, and insecure. But they all supported me and had faith in me. Every time one of them told me they believed I could do something my confidence level rose a little bit. For the first time in my life, I was surrounded by people who believed in me. That is really what made the difference for me. I felt like I must be worth something if people were willing to help me.

With their help I decided to transfer to a four-year college. At first I was planning on going to a state college. I didn't even consider applying to a university because I didn't think I had a chance. Then one of the staff members told me that they believed I did have a



# Crystal Brooks

Current Ohlone College Student ■ JOURNALISM MAJOR

chance. Again, the fact that someone else believed in me helped me to believe in myself. As soon as I felt like I could do it, I did everything I could to try and get into a university. I made UC Berkeley my goal. I hit a lot of road blocks along the way. I didn't have enough units and I was terrible in math. I had to take 20 units my last semester at Ohlone and by this time I was working again, 20 hours a week. I had to look for help in math anywhere I could find it. I did online tutoring, I went to my teachers during office hours and I worked with a math tutor on campus. In order to graduate on time and be able to transfer to Berkeley, I had to learn to jump over my hurdles, not stand in front of them and cry.

All of my hard work and everyone's support paid off. I was accepted to UC Berkeley and graduated from Ohlone with an Associate's Degree in Social Science with Highest Honors. I am about to begin my second semester at Berkeley and I am doing well. It is still hard for me to believe how far I have come, but I am grateful. My journey has taught me to surround myself with people who believe in me and to believe in myself, to take life one day at a time, and to work through obstacles, not get lost in them.

Thank you Ohlone College  
CalWORKs for changing my life!



**I DON'T REALLY SEE MYSELF AS A SUCCESS STORY.** I am merely following a dream that I've desired since I was child. At first I didn't think I had a serious chance because in my twenty year hiatus from the education scene, I had become a single parent on a fixed and very tight income. But my mom always told me that where there is a will, there is a way! I have the will and the EOPS/CARE & CalWORKs Programs here at Ohlone helped me make a way! At first I thought I was too old and that it was too late. But now I am happy to say that I was wonderfully wrong. Has it been a struggle? Yes. Is it worth it? Definitely. I do get frustrated and I do cry but I keep going. I may not be where I want to be right now but, I'm not where I used to be. I look forward to the coming semester with great enthusiasm and a willingness to succeed in my academic career. When my five year old son's father was diagnosed with a possibly hereditary brain disease and passed away less than two and a half months later, I asked myself if this was a good time for me to be in school. My answer? YES... 100%! Through staying in school I've learned the 3 P's; Patience, Prayer, and Perseverance!

# Rhea Flores

## CalWORKs Program Peer Mentor

Current Ohlone College Student ■ NURSING MAJOR

**WRITING A SUCCESS STORY REALLY MAKES ME UNCOMFORTABLE.** When people speak of success they use monetary amounts, certificates, degrees, and status to convey their success. I guess it's really subjective. Success. Currently I am an Ohlone College student and in the fall I am planning on transferring to a state school to pursue a degree in Nursing/Health Science. I am not entirely sure how I got this far.

In 2005 I decided to go on aid because I did not have the resources to support both myself and a child. I hated going on welfare for so many reasons, standing in the county line, endless paperwork and because ultimately I had become the person I had tried so hard not to be. Growing up, my mother always scared me about getting pregnant before finishing school because she always said I would end up on welfare. She always prided herself on being a single mother that earned a bachelor's degree and was always able to provide for her children. Going on aid was perhaps my worst nightmare. But I had no insurance and no real choice. I know my mom was really ashamed; so was I. I also was not ready to have a child. I spent all of my pregnancy pretending not to be pregnant. It was not until I had my daughter that I realized the amount of responsibility and love I had to provide. I decided that I had to do something for us. After spending a year at home caring for my daughter and grandmother I decided to go back to school. I knew it would be hard, but

I also knew it was not impossible.

My experience at Ohlone College has been one of the best experiences of my life. I can credit that not only to myself, but to the supportive services on campus. While I have always had a distaste for the county, the CalWORKs, EOPS, and CARE programs on campus have been my second home. I may not be sure how I got this far, but I am certain that these programs have been a part of the equation. The words of encouragement, the workshops, counseling, and relationships have blessed me with greater self respect. I encourage everyone to seek out these programs because it has increased my ability to become successful.

There have been many times in the last two and a half years that I have felt tired, sad, and helpless. I have also experienced happiness, hope, and joy. That's life! No matter what I do in this world I am not immune to human feelings or life. I can, however, surround myself with people who care and care for myself. I think that since beginning my journey at Ohlone I have grown, not just academically, but with my approach towards life and that has made all the difference.



# Candy Lopez

Current Ohlone College Student ■ SPEECH COMMUNICATION AND BUSINESS DOUBLE MAJOR

## **SINCE A YOUNG AGE (FIVE YEARS OLD) I WAS EXPECTED TO BE A MEDIATOR**

between my extremely abusive father and my mother. When my father became upset, I was the one told to "Make him feel better" in order to protect my mother and younger brother from being physically abused. The situation in my household growing up was very extreme. My father demanded my mother basically live out of our kitchen. She had to ask for permission to leave when she wanted to use the restroom or sleep. I was allowed to go back and forth from the kitchen to the living room, to bring him whatever he demanded. Messages would be communicated through me, including the one instructing my mom to go to the living room; to be "taught a lesson," a brutal beating. As a result, I have done many self-assessments to formulate the understanding that "I don't have to be my parents." I had to listen, observe, judge, and understand non-verbal language, tone, innuendos, etc. for my basic survival, which is very different than how a child normally learns via social cues. This set the foundation to become an effective communicator. I feel communication has always been in my blood. I have always been the "ear," "truth seeker," and "problem solver" among my friends and family.

Currently, I am in school after a ten-year absence. I took time raising a family and to go through and conquer a life threatening illness. I am in the process of

kick-starting my academic and career life, moving toward my goal as a motivational speaker. To do so, I am majoring in Communication and Business. I am very active in the community, still volunteering as a public speaker. I speak about ten times per month, visiting various sites, speaking about my past hardships, the resilience and faith I have which allows me to live life. I enjoy public speaking tremendously and watching the audience reactions. I am both honored and humbled after speaking, when someone approaches me and expresses how I "touched them" and made them think. I realize how important education is to my continued growth. I keep myself sharp by taking classes, attending seminars, and reading from many perspectives. I seek to keep myself current in order to cultivate ideas and thoughts that will empower me to be a phenomenal motivational speaker.

I currently attend Ohlone College in Fremont, California taking a full course load. I plan to graduate June 2009, with a degree in Business and Communications. CalWORKS has allowed me the means to purchase books, supplies, and pay for tuition, without hurting my family financially. My family has suffered great financial loss, by taking care of my rare and near fatal illness that ravaged our lives and my body over the last five years. The results of this disease, were three major surgeries, the resection of four organs and the removal of two organs. The surgeries and associated costs have left my



family financially bankrupt. We have had to apply for and accept State aid until we can get back on our feet.

My spirit is stronger than ever and my body has healed. With the financial help I have received, I am able to complete my education. This will enable me to help society by educating people on how to make the most of their lives, and pass on to my children by example the importance education holds in our lives.

My goal is to become a motivational speaker, helping people maximize their potential to live life to its fullest. I see myself as a dynamic speaker, well versed in learning styles and cultures, and able to produce a rich learning environment for others. My desire is to give people concepts to enable them to find their way towards personal growth. I believe motivational speaking is my "calling" and meets many areas of need in my life: giving back to society, making a positive impact on others, and allowing me the opportunity to stay creative.

# Tolu Dayo

Current Ohlone College Student ■ PHYSICAL THERAPY ASSISTANT MAJOR

**AS AN EMANCIPATED MINOR, I WAS GIVEN A 50% CHANCE OF SURVIVING.** My surroundings were overwhelmed by drug dealers and users, which lead to living in poverty stricken residences caught between gun battles. Because my life was like this, I encountered a struggle every day, but I was on a quest to gain wisdom. I am sure we all have a personal journey that has shaped us into who we have become. So, I am encouraged to invite you into the past through my journey to become educated. Can you imagine wanting an education so badly that you could taste it? My life as an emancipated minor is the perfect example of a

person never quitting.

Let me explain. At 16 I moved in my first apartment. Many days I had to choose between riding the bus or buying noodles to eat. I managed to survive my junior year of high school but the first day of school as a senior, problems surfaced. I was informed that I needed a legal adult to enroll me in school if I wanted to attend. School officials discussed among themselves and a representative directed me to go to the court house, with instructions on how to become emancipated. Three weeks later, I stood in front of the judge and stated "I want to go to school and I don't have anyone to

enroll me." He granted my motion. Sadly, my senior year of school lasted only one week. No matter how hard I tried to finish, getting to class was a struggle because I was hungry.

By the time I was 18 I was doing much better. My bills were stable and I enrolled myself in Edward Shands Adult School in Oakland. I used my grocery money for the month to buy my GED book. I attended class and on the way home I noticed my book was gone. I suspected the guy behind me. I shut down; lost without hope. It wasn't until I turned 23 that I gathered up enough nerve to try it again. My unborn son played a major part in that. I decided to enroll in Bryman College to become a massage therapist. I thought that this was great! I had a guaranteed job making \$40 to \$80 per hour. On the other hand, it was commission only. In addition, the legal aspects to that business sets you up for ultimate failure if you are broke. I didn't understand what went wrong, after speaking with a few chiropractors they all explained how those schools invite too many people in the field while there is no demand. The end result left me with a \$16,000 debt, and no job with little education.

Never quitting pays off! In 2007 I started at Ohlone College and this was my new beginning. But, no matter how bright it shines, bad weather always seems to find me. Summer 2007, Father's Day weekend gave me a reminder of every failed attempt I had struggled



# Teran Finley

Current Ohlone College Student

NURSING AND SPEECH COMMUNICATION DOUBLE MAJOR

through to stay in school. My car was impounded on Sunday and I needed to be in class that Monday. I cried all night, having flashbacks of every bad event in my past that I could remember. But when 6:00AM came I lifted my head, dried my eyes and got on the bus to school.

Currently, I am one semester away from two years at Ohlone. I am determined to become a Physical Therapist but for my short term goal, I will continue towards the Physical Therapist Assistant degree here at Ohlone. As a CalWORKs student, I have run into a lot of situations that have caused me more stress than ever. However, the Ohlone College CalWORKs program has helped me tremendously. Whenever I've needed something from the Coordinator I only ask her one time and the job is always done. I am always greeted with warmth and I know I am treated as an equal. Because of the road I have traveled it has allowed me to accept where I came from and to appreciate where I am going. Now that I am finally realizing my desire to become educated, I look back on my past transitions to that moment when I felt that desire burning within my soul and I can still taste it. I encourage you to understand that accepting "No" is not an option when your life and your offspring are dependent upon the decisions you are making today.

## **I MARRIED YOUNG AND THEN**

**HAD KIDS.** As perfect as I thought my life was, things can always change. My life took a different direction than I first had planned. My marriage ended in divorce and a short time later I ended up living in a homeless shelter, late in 2006. I spent six months in the shelter trying to put the pieces back together in order to change things for myself and my kids. I made the decision to go to school. I spent the six months in the shelter trying to get in school. I had to figure out a way to support myself and find housing for me and my kids.

I was working full time at a job that could not keep up with the needs of my family. It was then that I began looking into CalWORKs and how they could support me during school. I enrolled in school, gave notice to my job, and then signed up for CalWORKs. As scared as I was I knew that I had to take the steps toward getting in school. Since then I have been in school for the last five semesters. With the support of CalWORKs Program at Ohlone College, I have money for books, gas money, and child care for the children. I am no longer just going for my AA but I am looking towards getting a BA. I am a nursing and communication major with interest in several



schools, including Cal State, and San Francisco State. I am so grateful for the opportunity to finish school. If it wasn't for the support that Ohlone provides to me, I don't believe I would gotten this far. I am excited about finishing school, and about my future.

# Antrice Mitchell

Current Ohlone College Student ■ UNDECIDED MAJOR

**AFTER BEING OUT OF SCHOOL FOR A LITTLE OVER 18 YEARS, I MUST ADMIT THAT THE EXPERIENCE WAS TOTALLY FRIGHTENING. A**

few of my girlfriends and I went to Ohlone College to enroll in school to better ourselves for our children as well as for ourselves. With the registration and financial aid process completed we also signed up for EOPS (Extended Opportunity Programs and Services) which helps low income individuals and families with a variety of things during their educational experience. I was not aware of all of the services they provided, but I thought I would take a chance to go and find out. We were told that there was also a program open to us at the college called CalWORKs. "How cool!" I thought, because I was also a CalWORKs participant through Alameda County. I wasn't aware of this program or what it provided, but after meeting the CalWORKs Coordinator and hearing her story I knew all was not lost, and if she could do it, so could I. I never would have imagined how nice these people would be to me. They were human; people who experienced setbacks just as I had, and I found that even more encouraging.

My first year of college was a challenge, because I didn't know what to expect. There were numerous times where I felt overwhelmed and I would run-not-walk to the CalWORKs/EOPS office and the staff was always supportive, friendly, and kind. They offered hugs which really meant a lot and



felt so great. Just being a part of this I felt important and now I am not so overwhelmed. Shawna, the CalWORKs Coordinator, has always offered encouraging and positive feedback when I had and still have issues. Her professionalism with us, the students, is so amazing. Her patience means a lot and it has helped a lot with my progress in college. I believe in my heart that if it wasn't for the staff at Ohlone in the CalWORKs/EOPS department, I would have given up. But each time I was discouraged, something they said or did encouraged me to keep going with my studies and furthering

myself and my education. I must admit I have grown as a mother, student, friend and most importantly as a person. I do not have all the answers that I am searching for yet, but I do know that I am close to obtaining my goal. I must give a lot of credit to the people at CalWORKs, whom I have grown to know and love. I thank you so much from the bottom of my heart and depths of my soul for allowing me to be me and lending an ear when I needed to vent my frustrations. Without you all I could never have made it and I appreciate all you do.

# Shawna Luce

## Ohlone College CalWORKS Program Coordinator

Graduate Student, San Jose State University ■ COMMUNICATION STUDIES

### I'LL NEVER FORGET GETTING THE RESULTS FROM MY HIGH SCHOOL PLACEMENT TEST.

The principal told us that I was at a fourth grade math level and that he really didn't see how I would function in a high school level math class. But my parents insisted and I was placed in pre-algebra. The teacher was phenomenal and forced me to work harder than the other students. I ended the school year with an "A" in the class. I felt like I didn't deserve the "A" and just felt stupid. The following year I was in the algebra class and as the material got harder, the professor asked me if I preferred to leave the class because he didn't think that I could keep up with the coursework. I felt like I was the dumbest kid in the class. I transferred out and worked as a TA in one of the elementary classes.

Eleven years after my high school graduation, I found myself walking up the endless stairs of Ohlone College. Here I was, 22, recently divorced from an abusive man, and on welfare with a two year old baby at home. I was hurt, broken and scared to death of the journey that lay ahead of me.

I learned that I was eligible for three programs that became very instrumental in my success. EOPS/CARE and CalWORKs, three state-funded programs that assist and provide supportive services to students who were in similar situations as the one that I was in. Becoming part of these three programs was the best decision that I have ever made. The staff was

warm, welcoming, supportive and understanding.

After a lot of hard work and perseverance, my time at Ohlone was about to come to an end, yet I didn't want to leave. I had grown close to the staff of the EOPS/CARE and CalWORKs and just knowing that they couldn't transfer to SJSU with me scared me. The thought of higher education always scared me because I always felt like that dumb teenager who got asked to leave the algebra class because the material was getting too difficult.

Nevertheless, I transferred and graduated from SJSU and currently I'm employed at Ohlone College as the CalWORKs Program Coordinator. I feel like I'm able to give back to the program that helped me succeed. It is an honor to work with parents who are on welfare and desire to have a better life for themselves and for their children.

Currently, I am in the Graduate Program at SJSU where I am pursuing a Master's Degree in Communication Studies with an emphasis on Performance Studies. I wanted to pursue graduate school for various reasons. I needed to prove to myself that I'm an educated woman who can overcome amazing obstacles. I wanted my son to see and know the importance and value of higher education and to know that just because he lives with autism everyday doesn't mean that he can't have just as good an education as anyone else. And, of course, I wanted to be an example to the students in my program, showing them that they

too can get through Ohlone and get off of welfare. Everyday, I dream of graduating from the program with my Masters Degree and when I cross that stage and accept my degree, everyone in my life will know that dreams really do come true.



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