

Retirement and Resiliency: Deer Valley High School and the Rossmoor Scholarship Foundation

At Deer Valley High School (DVHS) in Antioch, career counselor Tammy Douglas-Dodson is acutely aware of the number of students who feel they don't deserve or aren't qualified to consider going on to college. Issues of family income, immigration status, health issues, and home conditions--all stand in the way.

For the past three years, the Rossmoor Scholarship Foundation (RSF) has worked closely with Douglas-Dodson to make sure every graduating senior is aware of the financial help offered by RSF. She is retiring at the end of this month, and will be missed.

With an enrollment of 1,800 students, 84% of DVHS students are socioeconomically disadvantaged, with 40% identifying as Hispanic, 29% as African American, 9% as Filipino, 9% Caucasian, and the remaining 13% representing a variety of other nationalities and minority groups.

What stands out from this diverse mix is an amazing quality of resilience. Each applicant has a story to tell...a challenge to be overcome. For example, one scholarship winner from last year wrote: "When I was 11, I saw my father attempt to take his own life." Growing up in a household marked by volatility, silence, and emotional neglect, she learned early what it meant to endure. The trauma of nearly losing her father—someone she once saw as a hero—forced her to confront fear and responsibility far sooner than most adolescents. As her relationship with her father became strained by his mental health and addiction, she stepped into a protective role for her younger brother while helping her single mother manage the home.

Despite an environment where communication failed and emotions were dismissed, she slowly transformed those experiences into strength. "I have learned to cherish others and to never push anyone away. ...I have learned to never let anyone tell me I am incapable, and to keep fighting for what I believe in. And most of all, I have learned that no matter where I come from, I will always have the power to choose the life I want to build." She is currently enrolled at CSU Fullerton.

And another scholarship winner wrote, "Growing up in Uganda and later transitioning to life in the United States has had an impact on who I am." His early childhood in Uganda was shaped by a strict educational system and a community deeply rooted in culture, tradition, and collective support. Although some of the discipline practices were harsh, these experiences strengthened his sense of responsibility, identity, and pride while also shaping a commitment to break harmful patterns in the future.

Becoming a student in the United States at thirteen brought new obstacles: loneliness, cultural disconnection, and the struggle to adapt to an unfamiliar school system and social environment. Yet instead of being defeated by isolation, he used it as motivation to build new connections and work harder toward success.

"My story is a blend of two cultures, and the lessons I carry from both help guide me into the direction of pursuing my dreams." He currently attends the University of California, Merced.

Submitted by: Robert Daines, RSF trustee