

Overcoming Huge Obstacles:

How One 2024 Rossmoor Scholarship Foundation Award Winner Made It to UCLA

“Spit it out!” his grade school classmates sometimes taunted. For Chima Oluo, it wasn’t an easy childhood. “Stuttering had severe negative impacts on my academic achievement, my social life, and my mental well-being,” Oluo wrote in his 2024 Rossmoor Scholarship Foundation (RSF) application. For him, reading aloud in class was particularly difficult. Teachers often left him behind because they thought he was “too slow,” and one school official even recommended that he be placed in special education. “My parents were livid at the suggestion,” he wrote, and “fiercely resisted.”

But ten years of speech therapy ultimately paid off. By the time he got to Deer Valley High School Oluo deliberately chose activities “that required immense amounts of speaking.” He emceed rallies in front of thousands of kids and competed in debate, placing among the top three in one state competition. For his academic achievement and overcoming huge obstacles on his way to a higher education Oluo not only was awarded an RSF Scholarship, he also received the Social Justice Add-on Award donated annually by Rossmoor resident Nancy Conrad.

In the Fall of 2024, Oluo entered the freshman class at UCLA—his dream school—where he began majoring in Political Science and Computational Sociology. In response to a recent RSF email asking how he was doing, he replied: “UCLA has challenged me in many ways I couldn’t have imagined.” Over his first two quarters at the University he “met some people I’ll call my friends for the rest of my life.” Besides enrolling in an upper-division class as a freshman, he made UCLA’s nationally ranked mock trial team (#1 in the nation this year) and earned a bid to the Championship Series of college mock trial. He also applied for and was accepted into UCLA’s External Vice-President Lobbying, a platform from which he will be advocating for change with local, state, and federal lawmakers. Finally, he appeared on local television to advocate against violence. It’s pretty obvious that the act of speaking words no longer functions as an obstacle for Chima Oluo.

At the end of his message Oluo writes: “As I look ahead to the next quarter, I remain motivated to honor your belief in me by continuing to strive for excellence. Your generosity is not only a financial gift, but a vote of confidence in my potential and my future. For that, I am endlessly grateful.” When RSF President Shirley Wiegand shared Oluo’s message with fellow trustees, several wrote back: “This is why we joined the Foundation.”

Submitted by: Wayne A. Wiegand, RSF Trustee