

COMMUNITY VOICES:

Support is out there; we just have to discover the courage and determination to find it

- By Priscilla Aguilar
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In high school, I was under-challenged and didn't have the support structure to stay motivated. You could even say I was a high school dropout around the age of 15. No one in my family pursued education, and I had no adult role models who demonstrated the importance of a college education.

By the time I reached my mid-twenties, I was taking care of my mother, surviving as a caretaker for other elderly in need and barely making ends meet with basic tasks, such as cooking and cleaning. The job, while important and necessary, lacked security and was emotionally and financially draining. With less than 12 hours of work a week, the struggle was real. Some days, I barely had enough funds to cover my bus fare on top of the financial burdens at home.

Learning the courage to prioritize was absolutely necessary when things were tough.

I can tell you the exact moment my life took a turn. While waiting at the bus stop on my way to help a client, I ran into a young woman. She was living with her parents, studying business at Bakersfield College and working on campus for the Office of Student Life. I had no idea that she would change my life in a number of ways.

Between work and classes, she would show me around the campus with the hope that I would be inspired to pursue a certificate or degree of my own. With her support and enthusiasm, I couldn't help but gravitate toward it, but I was afraid and confused with how I could make the concept of college work for me.

The first step was finding the courage and determination to finish my GED. Through that, I realized many careers were in dire need of qualified racial minorities and females. I enrolled at Bakersfield College for the electrician apprenticeship program and discovered tremendous support in the financial aid office, not only as a student but also as an employee.

I discovered a fondness for the office environment, and campus employment ensured my schedule was flexible so I could dedicate myself to my classes and continue taking care of my mother. I discovered a new support system where people genuinely wanted me to succeed. With a combination of student financial aid and my office paychecks, I realized what life could be like without the burdens of barely getting by.

More than ever, I know my story is not that unique. In my role on the campus as a financial aid student employee, I'm able to help fellow students with the assistance they need to change their lives. A wide variety of support is available at the home of the Renegades, from tutoring, Student Life, student communities, food and hygiene resources from the pantry, and of course, financial aid.

Bakersfield College made it easy for me to discover my internal courage and helped me stay determined to seek the support to build a better future. Without it, I might still be a dropout; instead, I'm an inspiration, helping younger members in my family pursue a college degree and introducing the programs that have helped me get to where I am today.

I'm sharing my story because the young woman I met on a bus helped me take the first step to change my life, and today, I'm breaking a generational curse. What can you do?

And who can you inspire to finish their education? I invite you to encourage others to be brave.

Bakersfield College is waiting, financial aid is available and the pathway to a brighter future is wide open.

Priscilla Aguilar is a BC student and a financial aid student employee.