

Head Start today...

College tomorrow!



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Kiona, 32

University of the Pacific, B.A.
May 2019



Head Start
CALIFORNIA

Kiona’s story

Kiona will complete a bachelor’s degree in May 2019. Her road to graduation began with Head Start, the federally funded program that promotes school readiness for children under age 5 from low-income families.

Twenty-seven years ago, Kiona’s mother was working on a bachelor’s degree in mathematics at Athens State University and raising her three children in a small town outside Huntsville, Ala., near the Tennessee state line. Head Start was a godsend, since she was unable to afford childcare for Kiona and her two older sons on her own. Because they were enrolled in the program, she could attend classes, knowing that her children were in good hands.

Kiona graduated from Head Start at the same time her mom finished her bachelor’s degree. Kiona’s mother “kept plugging away at her education,” Kiona says with noticeable pride, “eventually receiving her master’s when I was 15.” Today she is a second-grade teacher near Atlanta.

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Kiona talks fondly of her Head Start days: “I remember a lot of staff, especially Mrs. Ferris. She had a huge impact on all of us.” During her last year in Head Start, her good friend Spencer passed away, Kiona’s first experience with death, a shock, especially because he was also 5 years old. “The teachers were amazing,” Kiona says, “helping us kids make sense of it. I’ll never forget the way they instilled coping skills in me at such an early age.”

At the University of the Pacific, she has maintained a 4.0 GPA while working full time as an installation coordinator for a large printing firm and raising two sons and a daughter. “I want to show my children that it’s definitely possible to achieve what you want if you focus and work hard,” she says.

Kiona will graduate in May 2019 with a focus on organizational behavior: “I feel a need to help adults and perhaps will become a career counselor. I can see me inspiring people to think, ‘Maybe this is something I can do.’”

Kiona says that it was in Head Start that she first saw how great an impact adults can have in a child’s early life. Though her family has always “done our best to give back,” Head Start “gave me that extra push to help others.”

Know a family that could use a Head Start?