



# GREAT EXPECTATIONS

AN INITIATIVE OF VIRGINIA'S COMMUNITY COLLEGES



## WE ALL NEED SOMEBODY

### **Who was there for you as you stepped into adulthood?**

To stand by your side. To celebrate your successes and share your defeats. To keep you moving forward even when things got hard. And who helped with college applications, first job interviews, and balancing your first checkbook?

Nobody should have to make it through adolescence on their own. We all need somebody to show us the way through to adulthood. For young Virginians who have experienced foster care, that somebody is missing.



# PROGRAM SUMMARY

Today, Great Expectations is a nationally recognized program that helps Virginia's foster youth earn the postsecondary credentials they need to achieve an independent and successful life. Great Expectations is currently available at 18 of Virginia's Community Colleges.

Great Expectations was created in 2008 as a partnership between Virginia's Community Colleges and philanthropists supporting the Virginia Foundation for Community College Education. The program launched at five Virginia Community Colleges, each of which received a grant to pilot components of the program. Since then, the program has expanded to 18 community colleges across the Commonwealth.

Great Expectations helps Virginia youth who have experienced foster care complete high school, gain access to a community college education, and transition successfully from the foster care system to living independently.

## KEY COMPONENTS INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:

- Individualized tutoring
- Help applying for college admission and financial aid
- Career exploration and coaching
- Help applying for and keeping a job
- Life skills training, including managing finances
- Personalized mentoring

Cover:

**JEREMY**, Piedmont Virginia  
Community College,  
*BROWNELL METAL STUDIO*

**COACH MICKEY AND  
JESSICA**, Central Virginia  
Community College



# MEET ANTOINE

COACH SARAH AND  
ANTOINE, Piedmont Virginia Community College

Antoine needed a course correction. Football had sustained him through high school and into college. As he thought about his future, though, he needed a different plan. With no family to turn to, Antoine found the support he needed through Great Expectations.

To the casual observer, Antoine was doing fine. Despite his time in foster care, he'd grown into a quiet and composed young man. A former all-state football player, he'd even signed to play for a Division III college. Below the surface, however, Antoine was struggling. "I was at that school to play football, and by my sophomore year I knew that wasn't right for me," says Antoine. "Back in Charlottesville, I saw lots of people who were struggling for basic things like food and shelter. I realized that I wanted to go into business to make a difference in my community. The problem was that I had no idea how to do it."

Together with Great Expectations Coach Sarah Groome, Antoine began working on a plan. He enrolled at Piedmont Virginia Community College where he could begin developing general skills while working a job to support himself. "I didn't understand how the academic system worked and it was hard for me to see how each step leads to the next, but Coach Sarah helped me map it out," explains Antoine. "All of a sudden, I am having these thoughts about the future that I'd never had before. Lots of people never really take advantage of their blessings to give back to those who need help. That's not going to be me."

“Great Expectations opened me up to things I had never thought about.”

ANTOINE, CHARLOTTESVILLE, VA.

# COACHES: BUILDING THE BOND

A Great Expectations coach is typically the only healthy adult role model in a foster youth's life. Coaches reach out to foster students in high school to begin talking about the future. Together, they explore the young person's skills, values, and interests, and match them to higher education options. Coaches help with college applications and securing financial aid.

Once a student is enrolled, coaches provide the critical wraparound support that teenagers need, including the following:

- **Advising on curriculum choices**
- **Finding mentoring or tutoring**
- **Solving transportation and scheduling issues**
- **Career planning and job searching**
- **Budgeting and financial planning**

Simply stated, coaches provide the essential supporting relationships that normally come from a student's family. This support becomes the bridge by which students make a healthy and lasting transition into independence.

# AN ESSENTIAL CONNECTION WHEN IT'S NEEDED MOST

For children who have experienced foster care, the journey is a search for someone who is willing to invest in their future. Here in Virginia, that search is ending in success—thanks to Great Expectations.

Virginia ranks last nationally in permanent placements for youth who age out of foster care. One in four children who enter Virginia's foster care system will not find a permanent home before they turn 18. As a result, approximately 500 young people age-out of the system each year, which usually means making it on their own—often with devastating consequences.



## THE COSTS OF DISCONNECTION

Aging out of foster care is like stepping off a cliff. One day your basic needs are covered, the next you are on your own. In most cases, you have had little or no preparation for finding an apartment or living on a budget, let alone applying to college or seeking financial aid. These are just a few of the reasons so many young people leaving foster care struggle.

**A study of former foster youth in their mid-twenties revealed the following:**

**54%** were unemployed

**31%** percent had been homeless or couch surfed since exiting foster care

**80%** of young women had been pregnant since leaving foster care, including 32% before age 18

**Nearly 60%** of young men had been convicted of a crime, and 75% had spent time in jail

**8%** had completed a 2- or 4-year degree



# MEET HALEY

COACH JAYNE AND  
HALEY, Mountain Empire Community College

At age 19, Haley feels like she's been given a new lease on life even as she lists the risk factors she faces: early pregnancy, reduced educational achievement, low income, homelessness. "I am so grateful for Great Expectations. I don't want to be another foster care statistic," she says.

Haley left her birth home at age 3 and moved between twelve different foster families and a group home before she was finally adopted at age 17. "You don't feel like you can trust anyone after that. I just wanted to walk away from school forever because it had been such a bad experience. Then I met Coach Jayne."

Coach Jayne Stamper kept in touch with Haley after she finished high school. "Jayne was the one person who told me I was meant to be something. We would talk about my future and eventually she helped me sign

up for college placement tests and financial aid." As a second-year student at Mountain Empire Community College, Haley is on track to earn her associate degree in criminal justice. Not only is she planning to continue with a bachelor's degree in counseling, but Haley has also emerged as a vocal advocate for foster youth in Virginia. She travels around the state to share her experience of healing and recovery with other foster kids. "Great Expectations has changed my life. I am moving forward, I've made friends I never would have had, and I'm grateful for all of it. I hope this program grows everywhere."



“Great Expectations is all about healing and becoming better people than we ever thought we could be.”

HALEY, BIG STONE GAP, VA.

# THE PIVOTAL STEP TOWARD A NEW FUTURE

Virginia’s economic landscape is changing, presenting new opportunities for young people. A recent study estimated that the Commonwealth will need to fill 1.5 million new jobs by 2022. While as many as two-thirds of these positions will require postsecondary education, most will not require a bachelor’s degree. Instead, they will be filled by individuals with associate degrees or industry certifications.

By design, the educational programs at Virginia’s Community Colleges are both practical and flexible. One- and two-year credentials provide students with marketable skills in a wide range of in-demand career areas that can lead to immediate employment. Many times, students discover broader interests that lead them to more advanced education and training.

For many young people, especially at-risk populations such as foster youth, a college credential signals a profound turning point in their lives. It is the first external recognition of their talent and potential. For the first time, they feel a sense of purpose and direction. With options in front of them, they begin an educational journey that often leads to further training, more advanced skills, growing responsibilities and increased income.

# YOUR GIFT CHANGES LIVES

Together, we can all be there for Virginia's foster youth. Great Expectations, like many programs at Virginia's Community Colleges, is funded through private donations to the Virginia Foundation for Community College Education. Help us expand the promise of Great Expectations to all young people leaving foster care in Virginia.

## WITH YOUR SUPPORT, WE CAN

- Expand the number of coaches statewide so that all foster youth get the help they need to enroll and stay in college
- Provide emergency assistance for housing, transportation, and other real-world issues that directly affect a foster student's ability to succeed in school
- Grow peer mentor programs that connect young people with former foster students who have been successful
- Create scholarship incentives for short-term workforce credentials for occupations such as cyber security analysts, welders, pharmacy technicians, logisticians, HVACR technicians, or electricians
- Provide additional support services, such as a summer bridge program

# GREAT EXPECTATIONS

is empowering Virginia's foster youth through active support and access to higher education.

66

Degrees or Certificates were earned by Great Expectations students last year

1087

students are enrolled in Great Expectations in 2015-2016

25%

of Great Expectations graduates earn academic honors

226

Degrees or Certificates have been earned by Great Expectations students since 2008



# EXPANDING OUR REACH CHANGING LIVES

Great Expectations fills a critical and costly gap in the foster care system. The results are found in the growing number of improved lives across the Commonwealth.

CONTACT US [GREATEXPECTATIONS.VCCS.EDU](http://GREATEXPECTATIONS.VCCS.EDU) | 300 ARBORETUM PLACE, SUITE 200, RICHMOND, VA 23236



**Great Expectations**  
FOSTERING POWERFUL CHANGE

50th Anniversary  
**Virginia's**  
Community Colleges

A MAJOR INITIATIVE OF VIRGINIA'S COMMUNITY COLLEGES MADE POSSIBLE THROUGH FUNDING FROM THE VIRGINIA FOUNDATION FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGE EDUCATION, THE COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA, AND NOTABLE PARTNERS.

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