

Providing Quality Postsecondary Education: Access and Accountability

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Witness:

Ms. Trinity Thorpe

Student, Pepperdine University

Testimony

Good morning/afternoon Senators.

I am truly honored to be here today. This is something I never imagined myself doing. In fact, the majority of my accomplishments, my resume bullets you could say, would not exist if it weren't for a program called Upward Bound. I would not be where I am or who I am if it weren't for the constant encouragement, belief, and acceptance of the Upward Bound staff.

I need to tell you about my early life so you will understand what I mean.

To this day I don't remember completing an entire year of school until the eighth grade. This truancy was not in any way my own choice. Coming from my background, education was not viewed as an important thing. When your bed is the floor of a truck and the way you get your meals is to beg on the street corner, education is not a priority.

My biological mother did not feel it was necessary for me to attend school. In fact, she saw my joy in education and would ground me from school. Constantly on the move, switching homes, there was no stability or consistency in my life. Then, when I was in seventh grade, not even two months after my 13th birthday, my mother finally enrolled me in school.

I was thrilled, but at the same time I was crying for help. I needed someone to rescue me. Eventually, I was rescued but not in the way I had imagined. After only two weeks in the seventh grade I was kicked out of the school for distributing drugs. I had taken the drugs from my mother's stash while in our 7 by 9 foot pull trailer. I wound up in the juvenile justice system

Three months after being admitted to my last and best foster home, the courts allowed me to attend school again. I was given achievement tests. I was 13 years old, unable to fully comprehend reading, with very little knowledge of mathematics or science, taking a test to determine my school grade. They put me in remedial learning classes. I can still remember celebrating my first completed semester, I had earned a 2.4 GPA!

After that first semester in the eighth grade my life began to change. My foster mother pushed for me to join Upward Bound to take advantage of the after-school tutoring they offered. I agreed and joined Upward Bound in the ninth grade. My improvement was rapid and dramatic. My grades shot up to a 3.75 GPA and I switched from remedial to honors courses.

With this new feeling of accomplishment I had a new self-image. I didn't want to be like my mother and my old friends. I wanted something more for myself. I always had wanted something more I just didn't have a way to access it until Upward Bound came into my life.

Through Upward Bound I was given a myriad of opportunities. The first difference I noticed with Upward Bound is that the field trips were free. I never felt poor, and people believed in me. Education was becoming what I never thought it would be—for everyone. Although I began to believe in what this country refers to as equal opportunity I developed a sense of fear. I knew I wanted to go to college I just didn't think it was right for me.

When my senior year rolled around, I told my Upward Bound coordinator that I wasn't going to college. After knowing me for four years, she was shocked. I will never forget her reaction. I still can't tell if she was angry or if she sincerely thought I had gone crazy. She told me I would be wasting my mind, wasting a good chance that I might never have again. Although my foster parents had tried to convince me of this fact, it didn't sink in until my Upward Bound coordinator put it so squarely before me.

Instead of letting me get away with applying to one school, Upward Bound got me to apply to ten. I received acceptances, but the issue of money was still there. I had no way to pay for college. I expressed this to my UB coordinator who happily informed me that I had options. She introduced me to the FAFSA and to a million different scholarship applications. She didn't stop there. She wrote letters of recommendation, including one to the Gates Millennium Scholarship Fund.

Pepperdine University accepted me and offered me the largest scholarship. Plus, the Gates Millennium Scholarship covers the difference. I went on to receive the Anton Kollars Scholarship, and The Jim Casey Family Program scholarship totaling amounts that went well beyond the cost of my education. Not to mention that if I needed to have the scholarships increase for any particular reason there would be no problem. This was the first time in my life in which I actually felt financially stable.

And here I am in front of you, a junior at Pepperdine University, who is taking full advantage of the opportunity given to her and giving back in every situation possible. I now know I have the ability to point my life in whatever direction I want it to go. This ability, with all its blessings, is not something I would have had without the guidance, mentoring, and encouragement of the Upward Bound Program.

Currently I work as a researcher for a program called Los Angeles Bridges. This program is an outreach to high and low risk students of Fulton Middle School. This is where I learn to what extent programs like the Upward Bound are necessary on a much larger scale. The mean grade point average of the 85 high risk students in the program is a 1.9. These kids will be the beneficiaries of the Upward Bound Program upon entrance into high school. These kids may never see another way out of the cycle of poverty if

programs like this are eliminated.

I was a child who was crying for help, who needed someone to believe in her. Had it not been for the Upward Bound program I would not have made it this far nor will I make it my next goal.

Thank you for listening.