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◀ Photo courtesy of Tamanika Ferguson

STUDENT NEWS

Tamanika Ferguson: Reclaiming the Future

Junior Tamanika Ferguson serves as a volunteer at Mentoring A Touch Above, a nonprofit organization that helps youth in the juvenile courts and the California Youth Authority facilities make the transition back into mainstream society upon their release. A nominee for the William Randolph Hearst/CSU Trustees' Award, Ferguson brings her own experiences to counseling these young people, having dropped out of high school for a life on the streets, which resulted in her own detainment and probation as a teenager.

"I have the unusual experience of being a college student in conjunction with knowing a life entirely different than academia," she says. "Given my personal experience as a troubled youth, I believe that I can offer these adolescents hope, guidance, and support with my ability to interact in two different and distinct worlds."

Ferguson, who has received the Deborah C. Sears Scholarship and the Miriam Mathews African American Visions Scholarship from the CSU Dominguez Hills' Black Faculty and Staff Association this year, credits her 13-year-old daughter with being part of the inspiration to leave life on the streets behind and go to college.

"I was born and raised in Harbor City, California, a community where gangs and fast money were a way of life," she says. "I didn't have support or guidance from positive role models, which I believe play a crucial role in the growth and development of our youth today. Consequently, I dropped out of school, began to live a life that was self-destructive. I became a mother at 16. My friends were in and out of jail, using drugs, and dying. Finally, at the age of 25, I decided that I needed to make a change.

"I was tired of my lifestyle, and I was aware that my daughter was growing up without me, while being raised by her paternal grandmother. I am her role model and I felt in my heart that going back to school and furthering my education would give me the opportunity to provide her with a better quality of life."

In 2000, Ferguson enrolled at Long Beach City College, and graduated in 2004 with an A.A. degree in Liberal Arts. She then transferred to Dominguez Hills, and is currently pursuing a double major in Africana Studies and public administration. In addition to being a full-time student and raising her daughter herself, she strives to be a role model for her fellow students. Having received approximately \$25,000 in scholarships over the last five years, she advises them on her own by giving free workshops on how to best utilize opportunities for financial aid and scholarships.

She has been featured in *Who's Who Among America's Colleges and Universities*, made the CSUDH Dean's List three times, and received numerous leadership and academic awards from Long Beach City College, including the Viking Leadership Award, the Pacific Coast Crystal Leadership Award, and the Outstanding Student Award. Upon graduation, Ferguson plans to pursue both her master's and doctoral degrees in social welfare and public administration, and to teach at the community college level. But, as a mentor, she places her hope in the future of the generation to come.

"Having the opportunity to obtain academic and personal success has been a blessing and a reward," she says. "The benefit of mentorship for me is being able to touch the lives of others with whom I share a similar background. I now have the ability to provide guidance, support, and direction for our troubled, and often misguided, youth."

As a mother, and the first in her family to pursue a college education, her hopes are even greater.

"My mother didn't have the opportunity to obtain a college education, because she was a single parent with the responsibility of taking care of my brother and I while my father was incarcerated," she says. "My daughter is in the eighth grade, in the **AVID (Advance Via Individual Determination)** program at her school, an honors level program that prepares middle and high school students for college. My greatest hopes for her are that she strives to maintain excellent grades, pursue a college education in an area that she is interested in, and attain happiness in her personal pursuits."

- Joanie Harmon