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Oklahoma

What drives you?

My career goals and love of family drive me. In 2015, I was diagnosed with alopecia universalis. As one can imagine, it impacted my self-esteem, I withdrew from many activities I loved – like track and volleyball. My parents ensured that I took care of my mental health by seeking help when needed and by helping me find new, exciting hobbies. During that period, I developed my love for cooking. I watched countless cooking shows and learned to cook the recipes I saw on TV. That was when I decided that I wanted to become a chef.

When I reached high school, and my self-esteem improved, I decided to join some school clubs like the Spanish club and the African American Society. By the 11th grade, I felt as if I found my voice again and was able to rejoin some of the activities I had given up. I even joined the track team again after many years. I just loved the idea of running again after I allowed other people's taunts to let me give it up. I also decided to apply for a program developed by the Oklahoma City Thunder and Creative Arts Agency (CAA) called the Thunder Fellows. It was a 30-week program that was held weekly and was aimed at exposing teens to professional coaching and mentoring, coding, analytics, marketing techniques, and opportunities in sports, entertainment, and technology.

During the program, I began to cultivate my idea of wanting to become a chef into a bigger dream. I saw how my love of cooking could fit into the world of sports management with an emphasis on hospitality. My goal is to plan and manage major sporting events. I experienced personal growth during this program, like I had not experienced before. The leaders pushed me when I didn't want to be pushed. I had to speak out when I would normally be silent. I had to be resilient and juggle my responsibilities at school, at home, and in the program. While in the program, we met two to three times per week and the culmination was a capstone project focused on data-driven research presented in front of approximately 200 industry leaders and other stakeholders. A proud moment for me was when my team won the top award for our presentation. We won the Devon Energy Dynamic Performance Award for our presentation on *Offsetting the Racial Wealth Gap*.

From 2015 to the present day, I learned something about myself. I am stronger than my fears. I am smart, determined, and I won't let anything get in the way of achieving my goals. Obtaining a degree is the first step. My family helped me during one of the darkest periods of my life, and they will always be there to support me. As a result, I have a career path that I am excited about and goals that I am driven to achieve. With this financial assistance, my belief in God, hard work, and dedication, I will be successful.