



2014 NEOA ACHIEVER ~ Crystal Baldwin

Crystal Baldwin participated in TRIO through Upward Bound (UB) at Lyndon State College in 1997-2000. The UB Director then was Robert McCabe. Crystal was nominated by current UB Director Rick Williams.

I have been homeless. I've struggled to find food to eat. I recall a time when I enviously observed school kids throwing their whole lunches away and me following shortly behind to retrieve them from the trash. I lived day to day. Outside of my narrow tunnel of poverty I couldn't see anything. The expectation of my life was to make it through the day. In the deepest part of me it seemed that I would always want for food, a home, clothes that fit, and the fulfillment of basic needs.

Because of my family's poverty, my siblings and I were at direct risk of drug addiction, teenage pregnancy, and crime.

Though some of my siblings became immersed in these lifestyles, I did not because of UB. Upward Bound intercepted my life and provided me with direction in receiving a full-tuition scholarship to Berea College in Kentucky. Ultimately, education was my gift.

In UB I found others who shared my life experience. I gained confidence and was encouraged to strive for my goals no matter how out of reach they appeared. The directors of the program provided guidance, support, and mentoring throughout high school, college, and they continue to support my career goals. With referrals, recommendations, and assistance from UB directors I was accepted to all colleges to which I applied, found ways to afford it, received numerous awards in community service, and was hired into all of my desired employment positions.

Today, I co-coordinate the Consumer Assistance Program of the Vermont Attorney General's office. This free program attempts to aid consumers and businesses in resolving complaints without having to pursue expensive legal measures. Before UB, I never could have imagined that I would one day be responsible for managing and training undergraduate students, interns, and volunteers. Or, that I would appear on news programs to spread awareness about consumer issues and produce a newsletter for the entire state. I never thought I'd be a primary resource for families struggling with the same issues that my family faces. Every day, I see a reflection of what my life would have been like without knowledge and support. For this, I am so thankful that UB redirected my life to a path of self-sufficiency and embracing the power of learning.

I so believe in the ability of the UB program to implement change that I fully support its ideals by helping those with obstacles which I previously faced. I am coordinating a UB scholarship with five of my alumni peers, avidly supporting my alma mater, and mentoring current undergraduates.

Donating to certain charities can provide great benefits, but ultimately the act that makes the most difference is sharing the gift that I received in my life with others. As an educated person with success in her career, I have the ability to accomplish anything. It is my greatest personal hope that others will see my experience as a positive example and will also choose to change the course of their lives by obtaining an education. My life today would not be the same without Upward Bound.