

Charvett's Story

For over 10 years, the Foster Youth Alliance has been proud to lead our community in an unparalleled effort to ensure that foster children have every opportunity to look forward to a bright, productive future.

When recalling her time in foster care, Charvett, now 26, says, "This is all very fresh because I've just finished my law school applications." A sophomore in high school when she entered foster care, Charvett was shuffled through four placements and three schools in that first year alone. Back then, she didn't have time to dream of law school. She was just trying to hang on through all the upheaval. Each time Charvett had to change schools, she lost progress towards credits and had to struggle to keep her grades up. That same year, FYA fought to pass legislation to improve and assert the educational rights of youth in foster care, including the right to stay in their current school even if they have to move.

A year after coming into care, Charvett caught her first break when a relative of her baby's father took her in. It was her 5th placement, and although she would move again at the end of her junior year, it provided the stability she needed to fully reengage in school. She enrolled at Oakland Tech, and her grades soon began to soar. Knowing that the challenge of independence falls squarely on the shoulders of a foster child (unlike her peers from intact families, who could rely on parents for years after turning 18), Charvett enrolled in life skills classes at FYA member ILSP. At a program graduation, she felt inspired as she saw young people much like herself



being honored and praised for their accomplishments. She thought, "I want them to say something great about me next year. I'm going to try harder." With a little stability, opportunity, and inspiration, Charvett and her daughter Nylla began to thrive. That very year, FYA and its member agencies partnered with the county to expand the Transitional Housing Placement Program (THPP). When THPP was up and running, Charvett got one of the first apartments in this new supportive housing program for youth in care. "My THPP apartment was close to school, and with Nylla in daycare, I finally had some independence and could figure out what I wanted to do with my life."

Charvett stayed in THPP until she graduated from Oakland Tech. Like many foster youth, upon graduation she was immediately faced with dismissal from foster care. Alameda County was one of the first in the state to recognize their responsibility not to pull all support from foster youth the moment they turn 18. Charvett was able to transition directly from THPP to a sister program for emancipated youth, THP-Plus. "THPP had given me the opportunity to grow up so by the time I was old enough for THP-Plus, I'd been prepared for living on my own." THP-Plus housing through FYA member First Place for Youth was a lifeline for Charvett. "Not having to worry about being homeless, I had the opportunity to focus on college." She stayed with First Place as long as she could—2 years—and then she took full responsibility for the lease to her own apartment. That year, she enrolled at CSU East Bay. Testament to her commitment was the 2 hour commute by public transportation she made every day from her apartment in Oakland to her daughter's day care in San Lorenzo and on to the CSUEB campus in Hayward.

In her second year at CSUEB, Charvett learned that the school

wanted to do more to support foster youth on their campus. FYA had worked to bring this innovative campus support program, started in southern California, up to the Bay Area. Charvett stepped up to serve

CHARVETT WAS BORN FULL OF PROMISE. PLACED INTO FOSTER CARE AT 15, SHE FACED A SERIES OF DISRUPTIONS THAT THREATENED HER BRIGHT POTENTIAL.

FOUNDED AROUND THE TIME CHARVETT ENTERED CARE, FYA HAS FOUGHT EVERY DAY FOR POLICY AND PROGRAM CHANGES TO CREATE THE STABILITY AND SUPPORT SHE AND ALL FOSTER YOUTH DESERVE.

on the program's advisory board along with FYA's Executive Director. Today, Renaissance Scholars, a FYA member agency, is a robust, multi-faceted support program boasting outstanding outcomes. A leader in the first graduating class of Renaissance Scholars, Charvett received her BS in Business Administration in 2008.

"I can't imagine what it would've been like without the help of FYA," says Charvett, "to have interacted with all the services I did without their being connected. That's what I want the system to be for other kids coming up—it should be solid, giving them a clear direction to success." Today, as Charvett waits to hear about her law school applications, she is busy working full time at Kaiser in Oakland, volunteering with the PTA at her daughter's school and in the children's ministry at her church, and continues to champion the programs that have helped her along the way. Charvett's drive and resilience have brought her this far. She now has time not only to dream but to plan. She wants to work as an attorney for foster youth and plans to focus on their mental health, housing stability, and education. "I know that's pretty broad," she says, "but I believe if we can take care of those three areas, foster youth can do anything they put their minds to."

--Melinda Clemmons