

# Cal State East Bay's Renaissance Scholars Program Hailed at Recognition Dinner on Hayward Campus

By Nicole Olson  
Staff Writer

There is nothing simple about overcoming the devastation of being neglected, unwanted, abandoned or alone.

When every statistic stands as evidence against your odds to succeed, most give up and let go—but not everyone.

Determined to overcome impossible odds of a childhood in foster care, 27 Cal State East Bay students came together to celebrate with many supporters during the Renaissance Scholars Recognition Dinner held last Thursday.

"For far too long we've been an overlooked population and a voiceless minority," said Kevin Bristow, coordinator of the program and a former foster youth himself.

"And for 15 long years I've sat and waited for someone to recognize that we do have a voice; that we've in fact been screaming at the top of our lungs for longer than any of us can remember; screaming for someone to help us—to save us—and to fix a broken system that has broken so many of our hearts."

Although 46 percent of foster

youth fail to complete high school, only 1 percent graduate college and 40 percent of the homeless were once in the child welfare system, said Bristow. He is determined to help make these numbers change with each scholar.

Chantel Johnson was a senior when the program began. As the first alumna of the program and a former ASI president, she returned to campus to give a speech at the dinner.

"There are possibilities for life after the system," she said. She recalled being pushed and helped along the way and is now attending graduate school at Sacramento State.

"From now on there will always be a place for foster youth at Cal State East Bay," she said.

Charvett Blincoe is one of three scholars graduating from CSU East Bay this year. However, it has been a long road in which her childhood offered little comfort. She was adopted at birth to parents who divorced when she was six years old. By age 10, she began to be abused by her mother's boyfriend.

At 15, she entered the foster care program alone and pregnant. Her daughter Nylla was born



**Renaissance Scholars:** Students of the program were recognized for overcoming difficulties they faced as youths in foster care. Photo/Renaissance Scholars Program

shortly after. She recalled the devastating events during her emotional speech.

"The idea of college never occurred to me. This December I am graduating with a degree in business administration," she said proudly. She added that the program made her feel that "finally someone was listening."

And they are. Paul Garcia is another scholar who grew up in foster care his whole life. He was adopted twice but neither lasted. Due to his difficult childhood in the system

he turned to gang membership for support. It took getting shot to realize he wanted more from his life. He is now a junior majoring in sociology.

"I never expected I would go to college. It was never in my mind," he said. "I know if I can do it, other people can do it."

During the dinner, Kevin Bristow, the program's director, told supporters and donors, "Without all of you I would be one man with a vision and no voice."

Bristow reported the average GPA for foster youth when the

program began two years ago to be 1.84. Today it has jumped up to 2.67. Bristow's help has meant the world to the scholars he helps every day. During an open forum many of the scholars stood to tell their stories and give thanks.

"You really notice the difference when you have someone like Kevin and the Renaissance program in your life," said Ashley Butler, a senior majoring in sociology, who admitted texting Kevin at night for help.

Butler was not alone. "Kevin believes in me more than I believe in myself," said freshman scholar Xavier Aranda.

And Alex Ligon, a senior scholar majoring in biology, said Bristow is a father figure to him.

"I'd like to thank all the donors for helping us become what we are," Ligon said.

When special guest State Assemblyman Alberto Torrico took center stage, he began by quoting lyrics from a clarinet rendition done earlier by one scholar.

"Amazing grace, how sweet thou art. I once was lost and now I'm found," he said thoughtfully. "I hope when you look around the room you see what tomorrow's leaders look like."

Torrico said that in two years,

California is on schedule to pay more money on correctional facilities than on all California higher education schools combined, including all UCs, CSUs and community colleges. As he looked around the room, he encouraged all to fight to make a change so more dreams can become realities.

"Nobody can tell you who you're going to be or what you're going to be. You're not numbers, you're individuals," he said.

The program has received considerable attention from the media and has been the subject of many inquiries, Bristow said.

"Everyone comes together and works so hard for these students," said Sandy Sanders, director of corporate relations. She said she has been getting calls from places around the country inquiring into how this program was set up. "The program is becoming a national model."

Representatives from Walter S. Johnson and Wells Fargo were among the many supporters and sponsors at the event.

Scholar Dante Rodgers summed it up best when he stood and recited a piece he wrote.

"We made it, and it feels good to be here."

## Taekwondo Students Get Their Kicks From Martial Art

By Gloria Lau  
Staff Writer

Imagine being in a class where you can take out all your aggression, be loud, kick and punch—a class in which you are rewarded for your fighting spirit.

That is what KPE 1016 (Taekwondo) is all about.

Taekwondo has been around Cal State East Bay since 1971. Unlike other campus martial arts courses such as hapkido (KPE 1015), a Korean martial art, and judo (KPE 1013), which both involve throws, strangles and joint locks, taekwondo is about kicking and punching.

The university's taekwondo class is taught by Edward Miranda who has been teaching for 15 years. Miranda came to CSUEB as a transfer student. The first class he took in his first quarter was taekwondo.

"I think taking the class had a profound impact on my career choice," Miranda said. "I now work as an instructor for the university."

On April 25, members of the CSUEB taekwondo team competed in the 33rd National Collegiate Taekwondo Championship at Stanford University, and placed 1st, 2nd and 3rd in gyorooigi (sparring).

Competing among black belts, Aileen Arcina won third place.

Competing among white and yellow belts, Philip Ha won first place and Andrew Parker won third.

Competing among green and

blue belts, Hai Nguyen won second place while Linda Rall won third.

And competing among the red belts, Scott Silver won third place.

Ha, a first-year taekwondo student at the university, pointed out that the Taekwondo Club brings a good spin to the reputation of the East Bay.

"When people hear East Bay, they don't automatically think, 'Oh, wow,' but we gave it our best to give CSUEB a positive reputation," he said.

As Linda Rall put it, "It is a lot of fun and we are always learning."

KPE 1016 is offered Mondays and Wednesdays 4:00-4:50 p.m. and 5:00-5:50 p.m., and Tuesdays



**Martial Artists:** East Bay's taekwondo team took home high rankings in the 33rd National Collegiate Taekwondo Championship at Stanford. Photo/Courtesy Taekwondo team

and Thursdays from 4:00-4:50 p.m.

The CSUEB taekwondo team will be part of the Pac West taekwondo championship competition at U.C. Davis from 5-8 p.m. May 31.

For more information, contact Chris Nourat at tkdnourat@gmail.com.

## Hayward Jaycees To Celebrate Official Chapter Status

Jaycees' Hayward chapter will hold its charter night banquet on Saturday, June 7 at 6 p.m. to celebrate its official chapter status, which it obtained in February. It will be held at Francesco's Restaurant in Oakland, located at 8520 Pardee Drive.

The Jaycees fosters leadership development

in its members, who range in age from 21 to 39 years. An international organization, its chapters are located in 110 different countries.

For more information on the Hayward Jaycees Charter Night, contact Hayward Jaycees Chairman of the Board, Marty Lowe, at martylowe2@yahoo.com or (510) 290-5866.



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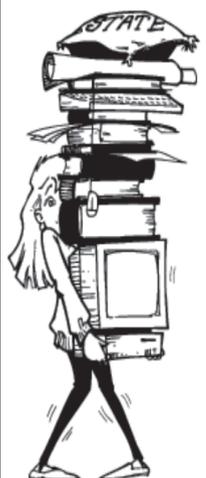
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