

Alaafia Vaz

I grew up in Brooklyn, New York and was raised entirely by my mother in a low-income neighborhood. Never really having a solid job, my mom used her creativity to do freelance jobs like graphic designing to provide for me. While my basic needs were met, there was no money available for me to participate in extracurricular activities or to even receive tutoring, and because I attended underprivileged schools, these resources were not easily accessible nor free. These circumstances, while unfortunate, helped me become more of an independent, resourceful, and responsible individual. I taught myself how to paint and create dance routines. I studied endlessly on my own, without any outside help. My challenges seemed to be even more complex because I had no father figure in my life. This absence negatively affected my self-confidence and emotional stability, causing me to feel lost and unwanted. Despite having an involved mother, I resented my father for not consistently maintaining contact with me and for not wanting to be a participant in my life.

I plan to double major in Political Science and Spanish at a prestigious educational institution. I aspire to become an immigration attorney, helping and supporting others who have dreams that are limited due to their citizenship status. Everyone should have equal rights and be treated with respect, regardless of their background, so I want to use my voice and passion for justice to advocate for others, especially those who I can relate to like minorities and the middle to lower class. By becoming an immigration attorney, I hope to create a more just society for future generations and support a more diversified and strong America.

Throughout my four years of high school, I have always tried to give back to my school and community. I have participated in Thanksgiving food drives, giving away turkeys and canned goods to families in need, I have volunteered at local animal shelters, comforting and caring for ill and abandoned animals, I have sung Christmas carols at a local nursing home, and the list continues. Nevertheless, what is most important to me is not the number of hours I have accumulated, but the knowledge I gain, the relationships I build, and the smiles I put on the faces of others. Although my main motivation in doing service is to make others happy, I have also benefited. Doing service work has humbled me tremendously and compelled me to be more grateful for the things I often take for granted. Through service, I have the opportunity to get to know the members of my community and school. As a result, I have improved my communication skills and gained a better understanding of different cultures and backgrounds. I will continue to participate in community projects and events, aiming to become a responsible and active citizen who works to solve societal issues.

I intend to use the PACE scholarship to help fund my college education and essentially become the first college student within my family. The much-needed scholarship money will go towards enhancing my educational career. Although I have faced many challenges, I have never let my circumstances define me. I have maintained a 4.3 GPA, a positive attitude, and I am a consistent participant and leader in various school and community-based organizations/clubs. With financial help, I will be able to achieve my goal of resolving societal issues and advocating for others, especially those who belong to communities I identify with.