



without the benefit of a generous scholarship provided by an anonymous donor that's helping make Calinda's college experience a reality.

She is one of the Beacon students who has been receiving tuition assistance the Beacon Achievement Scholarship, created through the generosity of an anonymous donor who is deeply committed to changing the lives of students with learning and attention issues.

Calinda Strayhorn

Hometown:
Ocala, Florida

Year:
Sophomore

Major:
Humanities

Calinda Strayhorn's GPA is almost perfect.

She started a theater club where students wrote and starred in their own musical. She plays flag football and works two jobs in the library.

Needless to say, 20-year-old Calinda is making the most of her time at Beacon College.

"I'm able to do so much here that I wouldn't have been able to do anywhere else," Calinda said.

Nor would she have been able to do what she has at Beacon

The award focuses on making higher education more affordable to Beacon students with the biggest financial needs.

"The tuition assistance helped make a difference for me because I probably wouldn't have been able to afford school without the financial assistance and financial aid that I'm getting," said Calinda, an Ocala resident who majors in humanities. "This support has helped me so much."

For families with children who learn differently, there often are lots of extra expenses. Money for therapy. Money for special foods. Money for doctors. All those



costs make it tough for parents to save and plan for college, said Calinda's mother, Shannon Barbeau, who works in retail. Calinda's father is retired from the U.S. Navy.

"You're just trying to get them healthy and happy and OK. You don't imagine them going off to college because you're so in the thick of everything," Shannon said.

“Every scholarship is definitely helping. Any help that you can get as a scholarship helps ... to make sure that those kids' dreams aren't stopped because of that.”

Calinda began pouring the foundation of her dreams in her teen years. In high school, Strayhorn was a standout, graduating in the Top 20 in her class with a lengthy list of extracurriculars on her resume.

But after she graduated, she said she felt lost when she enrolled at a mid-size college that lacked support services. There wasn't any theater, her passion. She didn't connect with the other students.

"Whenever I was going to classes, it just felt off. Like I almost didn't fit in," Calinda said.

A friend suggested she consider Beacon College. In a whirlwind, she toured, fell in love with the school and started last year.

Beacon's mission is to serve students with learning and attention issues. Calinda has autism which makes her sensitive to different textures and loud noises.

And the scholarship allowed her to plant in soil that is fertile for supporting students' learning needs as they grow. And with help paying for school, Calinda isn't burdened by a load of student debt. Instead, she is focused on what careers she will pursue after she graduates. She debates whether she wants to become a librarian or a theater teacher.

At Beacon, she found professors who have been understanding. Calinda said she has learned how to self-advocate for herself and discover her strengths and weaknesses.

Calinda credits Beacon for helping her discover "who I want to be as a person."

"The school has helped push a little bit more out of me the more and more that I've been here," Calinda said.

In doing so, Calinda has morphed into a leader on campus and grown more independent, her mother said.

"She is just a really good student, and she's just got more courage and ambition than most kids her age," Shannon said.

"She's got that inside her, but having a place where she can put all that energy into, and it's a safe space where if she has an idea, she's like, 'I'm going to make this happen.' I think Beacon has really allowed her to thrive in that way."

At Beacon, Calinda works as a student tutor and a library assistant.

She is president of the Beacon College Theatre Club where students performed their own fantasy musical called "Legend of the Phoenix." The students wrote the script and the original songs, built the set, constructed the costumes and then sold tickets for a one-time, 30-minute show at the Student Center this April.

"The fact that we were able to put it on in the span of two months was also insane," Calinda said. "It was a huge success. It was so inspiring just to see all these kids come together to create something."

Here at Beacon, Calinda has found her community.



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