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Student Spotlight

March 2017

The Emery Family Carson City, NV



When speaking with Melanie Emery about her children, she lights up and you can feel the enormous amount of love, pride and protection she has for them. The three children she calls her “forever children” today were adopted through the foster care system – all of them siblings who were in need of a safe and nurturing home environment. Melanie and her husband Nick have given them that – and so much more.

With no biological children of their own, Melanie and Nick felt called to become foster parents several years ago while residing in California. They soon welcomed into their home a young pair of siblings, Neveah and Grace, who were only 2 and 1 years old at the time. The sisters had a difficult start in life and were in need of love, security and extra care – all things that the Emerys were more than able and willing to provide. Eighteen months later, the Emery family was overjoyed when the girls became their “forever daughters” after finalizing their adoption. Eventually, a son named Josiah, Neveah and Grace’s biological baby brother, would join their family.

Shortly after they adopted Neveah and Grace, the family moved to Carson City, Nevada, where Nick began to serve as a senior pastor of a local church. Although the girls were very young when they came to live with Melanie and Nick and were thriving in their care, they still carried some of the after effects from their previous life. Realizing what an important role she would play in helping the children to overcome any scars from the past, Melanie devoted her time to caring for her children and ensuring their needs were met. And as the girls grew older, those needs included making sure they were able to learn in a safe environment that would help them grow and reach their full potential.

Unfortunately, Melanie soon learned that the school they were zoned for was among the lowest performing schools in the area. Their oldest daughter, Neveah, was scheduled to start Kindergarten that year and Melanie was worried that the environment would not be suited to her needs, not just academically, but socially and emotionally as well given her history. However, with seemingly no other choice, they decided to give the school a chance. But when they brought Neveah to school on the first day of Kindergarten, they were shocked to learn that she had 37 children in her class – nearly double the amount of children in a typical or recommended class size for Kindergarten. Melanie worried that she would digress in a class this large and that the teacher would not be able to give her the individualized attention she desperately needed. Her worries became reality when, after only a few weeks in the class, Neveah began to feel overwhelmed, stressed and overstimulated at school.

Fearing the long-term negative impact this would have on Neveah's progress, both in school and at home, Melanie and Nick knew they would need to make a change. While searching for their options, they learned that their family qualified for the Nevada Educational Choice Scholarship Program through the AAA Scholarship Foundation, enabling them to choose a school environment that would meet their children's learning needs and easing their financial worries.

With the help from the AAA Scholarship Foundation, the Emery family found the right academic setting for Neveah in a local private school, and eventually her younger sister Grace joined her there, also on a AAA scholarship. With its smaller class sizes and family-like environment, the Emerys feel confident in the choice they have made in their children's education.

"I love how the teachers and administrators know our daughters' stories and background, and are able to offer the individualized attention and care that they need," Melanie says. "Our girls are thriving in an environment that provides them with the education they need to succeed, while reinforcing the morals and character qualities that we try to instill at home."

Now in the second grade, Neveah is excelling – academically, socially and emotionally. She is making all A's in her classes and even taking piano lessons. Grace, currently in the first grade, is also making all A's in her classes and even reading above grade level and moving on to more advanced work.

The scholarships have eased the Emerys' minds and helped them to be able to focus on their children, as well as their passion for helping others in the foster care system. Going through the foster care and adoption process themselves, and recognizing the overwhelming need for children to have a voice, Melanie and Nick became volunteers with the Carson City area CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocate), an organization that provides trained volunteers to act as liaisons for the children involved in child welfare cases in the court system in an effort to get them the best possible help and outcome.

Seeing firsthand the positive outcome the right environment can have on a child – whether at home or at school – they are determined to make a difference for more children like their own.

"To make such a profound impact in just one child's life, that makes it all worth it," Melanie says. "The AAA Scholarship Foundation and its amazing donors are making a huge difference for my family, and through these wonderful programs, corporations have the ability to help so many more families, from all walks of life and from various parts of our country. The end result – better educated youth that grow into successful adults – benefits us all."

About AAA Scholarship Foundation

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Student Spotlight

February 2018

Andrew Ambrose
Lake Mead Christian Academy
Henderson, NV



When asking Tessa Ambrose how her son Andrew was adapting to his parent-selected school, she had to fight back tears. “I can’t describe the feeling,” she says. “This school has changed my son’s life as well as mine.” Now a freshman in high school, and exceeding expectations at Lake Mead Christian Academy, Tessa knows none of this would have been possible without the financial assistance from the AAA Scholarship Foundation.

A stay at home mother of three, Tessa was adamant about teaching her children the importance of education at a young age. Formerly attending their local public school, she learned early on that her son Andrew was very bright; however, he was having trouble focusing on tasks being given to him. When she found out that Andrew had Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), Tessa was worried that the teachers at Andrew’s school would not be as empathetic to this as she hoped. The issue actually wasn’t that the teachers didn’t want to help – it was that classroom sizes were already exceeding the normal limit, which left them little time in their day to further help students, like Andrew, receive the one-on-one attention that they needed. Andrew felt neglected, and Tessa was beginning to run out of options.

Tessa was determined to put her son in an educational setting that would address his specific learning needs, but her family’s financial standing was holding her back. With her husband being the primary source of income, Tessa was unsure of how many options, if any, they had. It was clear that Andrew needed to be in a school that was both aware of his learning disability while also nurturing of it, but the next best school was Lake Mead Christian Academy – a private school in town. Tessa simply didn’t have the financial means to make this possible, but was adamant in finding a way. After repeated visits with the financial aid office, she was ecstatic to find out about the AAA Scholarship Foundation.

According to Tessa, the overall change in Andrew since attending his new school has been extraordinary. Not only has his self-esteem grown tremendously, Tessa can't get him to leave school! The teachers at Lake Mead Christian Academy have surpassed her expectations. They offer both before and after school assistance to all students, and if they see students struggling with a subject, they have them attend study hall where teachers and their aides are available to work with them one-on-one until they feel confident with their work. "They care about me mom, the teachers care," says Andrew Ambrose.

Because of his learning disability, Andrew needed more time on assignments and tests than his peers. The teachers were more than understanding and allowed him as much time as possible. If for some reason he didn't do well on a certain test, the teachers would call him back in and go over it personally with him to see what he didn't quite understand.

"Before this school, I had to pay for tutoring, which left us low on groceries for the week," says Tessa Ambrose. "Now I can't get him to leave! The school truly wants their students to succeed."

With his new-found confidence, Andrew has also auditioned for the theatre program at his school. In the most recent productions, *You're a Good Man* and *Charlie Brown*, Andrew was cast as the lead role for both! With the additional help offered to him by his new school, Andrew now has the time to pursue his love for theater without worrying about falling behind with his grades. Andrew also loves studying world history and English – he is now in English honors and maintaining A's and B's on every report card. Tessa knows none of his accomplishments would have been possible without the ongoing support from the faculty members at Lake Mead Christian Academy, as well as the AAA Scholarship Foundation. One afternoon Andrew came home eager to write a letter. When Tessa asked him who the letter was for, Andrew replied "the school told me I should write a letter to AAA. I need to thank them for their help!"

"Because of the AAA Scholarship Foundation, my son has the confidence to strive for excellence," says Tessa Ambrose. "Andrew tells me often how thankful he is for the AAA Scholarship Foundation and what a blessing it has been to him. As a parent, I appreciate all of the time the people put in to make this organization possible. I'm truly grateful."

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Student Spotlight

March 2018

Sofia Tabaniag
Calvary Chapel Christian School
Las Vegas, NV



The AAA Scholarship Foundation does so much more than provide economic assistance to low-income families. They give children, like Sofia Tabaniag, a chance. A chance to challenge themselves academically and a chance to flourish as both a student and as an individual. This scholarship gives children the chance to push themselves to do the best they possibly can, in all aspects of life. Now in the 3rd grade, and attending Calvary Chapel Christian School, Sofia has surpassed every expectation and hope her mother landell could have ever wished for – which was all made possible by the people and donors that work tirelessly to make this program possible.

landell Tabaniag grew up in Hawaii and attended a local public school alongside her siblings. While she received a proper education, she wished more scholarship opportunities were available to give her expanded educational options. When landell became a mother herself, one of her main priorities was to give her daughter, Sofia, the best education she could. Unfortunately, this meant landell would need to make some sacrifices. Hawaii would always be home to landell and her family, however there weren't as many affordable school opportunities that she felt would be a good fit for her daughter. landell has family that lives in Nevada, and after many months of researching and seeking advice from her relatives, she made the bold decision to pack up and move across the country.

landell's husband found work as a supply clerk for a medical facility, while she began serving as a teacher's aide. However, they found out after moving that the Las Vegas public school Kindergarten programs offered were only part time and the quality of education their daughter would receive would not be the best. landell received a recommendation about a private Kindergarten program that they believed Sofia would thrive in at Calvary Chapel Christian School. When landell and Sofia visited the school, they were blown away by how welcoming the staff was to them.

Instructors were passionate about teaching and wanted their students to work together and rely on one another to make an impact on the world. The cost was much higher than landell and her husband had anticipated, but they worked tirelessly to make it work – making financial sacrifices and working with the private school to pay in installments to help keep up with the rest of their bills. The move alone was a challenge, but adding in other factors, such as Sofia's education, was taking a toll on the Tabaniag family financially. Even with two incomes, their family was struggling to make ends meet.

As first grade was quickly approaching, landell needed options. She considered other options, including the local public school program, and while she was not opposed to it, she knew this would be one of the many hurdles her family would face. Even at a young age, Sofia demonstrated promising potential and landell felt that the only way this would continue would be to find a setting where she wouldn't fall behind in a crowd of students. The Kindergarten program that Sofia was attending had informed landell about AAA Scholarship Foundation. Because her family met the household income requirements, she applied for a scholarship and was more than relieved to hear that they qualified. landell's hopes and dreams for her daughter were slowly becoming a reality.

Fast-forward three years and Sofia is doing better than landell could have ever imagined. Not only has she found her "home away from home," but she is being challenged academically in a healthy way. Now in the third grade, Sofia is learning and studying above grade level – while also maintaining A's! She has improved in many subjects, including writing, reading comprehension and spelling. This year she has even learned cursive! The school pushes their students to step out of their comfort zones. For instance, the students are required to participate in a public speaking program called Speech Meet which helps teach them important skills that they will continue to use for the rest of their lives. Sofia has competed in her class, won first place, and will be competing in the District Speech Meet with other private school winners. The school also values the arts and participates in an art festival, in which Sofia's artwork was recently chosen to compete among the other private school entrants. Because of the relationships Sofia has already built with her former teachers, she looks forward to moving up grade levels and meeting new teachers. Sofia has a true passion to learn, and landell knows this opportunity wouldn't have been possible without help from the AAA Scholarship Foundation.

"What word is there to even describe how grateful I am," says landell Tabaniag. "This scholarship is the best thing to ever happen to our family. I remind Sofia every day to make the most of her work because her being able to attend this school is a blessing and not many children have this chance."

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Student Spotlight

May 2018

Dereck Sandoval
Little Flower School
Reno, NV



“The first step toward change is awareness. The second step is acceptance.”
–Nathaniel Branden

This quote embodies Karla Martinez. Facing many challenges both emotionally and financially, she never gave up on her primary focus – ensuring her son Dereck receives a quality education. Not only has the AAA Scholarship Foundation made an impact on both of their lives, it was a true gift to their family in a time of need. “When times were hard, and it felt like every door was closed, the AAA Scholarship Foundation was there to remind me to remain hopeful, and to keep working hard as a single mother.”

15 years ago Karla Martinez made the bold decision to move from her home in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, all the way to Reno, Nevada. She knew she'd be leaving behind everything she'd ever known, but she was ready to broaden her horizons and see what more the world had to offer. Upon moving, Karla was able to land a job as a medical biller and coder and start a family. When her son Dereck was born, she immediately knew that she wanted to give him the world, and she would do anything to make that happen. Unfortunately, Dereck's father was not on the same page. When Dereck was only in Kindergarten, and Karla was working long hours just to make ends meet, they were heartbroken to find out that Dereck's father had left without even a warning. While this undoubtedly brought upon questions and tears, Karla stayed strong for her son and continued to put him first. From that moment, she knew it would be a long road ahead, but the love she had for her son made anything seem possible.

Dereck had been attending Little Flower School - a private school in Reno, Nevada. With her son's education being her first priority, she wasn't sure how she was going to manage to continue to send him there. Luckily, she had some money saved to get him through the first two years, but as that slowly disappeared, Karla was beginning to run out of options. Their family was already experiencing a tremendous amount of change, and the last thing Karla wanted to do was take away the school that she and Dereck loved.

Just as Karla was beginning to lose that last bit of hope, she came across the AAA Scholarship Foundation, and learned that they worked with families in Nevada. After researching and finding out that her family did qualify for a scholarship, Karla was overcome with joy. She could see that things were starting to look up for her, even when she thought there was no possible way.

Dereck is now in the fourth grade at his school of choice, and Karla can finally see the light at the end of the tunnel. Not only does Little Flower School have an excellent academic curriculum, but they also have capable and professional teachers who are constantly taking training courses to keep up with the new era of technology. Additionally, the school has a strict security system that gives parents a peace of mind regarding their children's safety. The school is adamant about getting the parents involved in school activities and projects, and has become a safe haven for children like Dereck. Being at this school, Dereck has improved academically and socially. He is able to learn at a high speed, and can keep up with his fellow classmates. He has the confidence to ask questions, and be more involved in classroom conversation and activities. He enjoys science and basketball, and does not limit himself to trying something new. He's even developed a love for acting and performing arts! Karla can see a great change in her son in comparison to how he was four years ago, and it all shows in just his smile.

"As a single mother, having the opportunity to be a part of the AAA Scholarship Foundation has impacted my life in so many ways," says Karla Martinez. "Because of them, I was able to build a solid academic base for my son's future. I just want to take the opportunity to thank you all for your support, we are so happy to be one of the scholarship families in Reno, Nevada. Thank you!"

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