Josefina’s Story
~ Helen Oliff / National Relief Charities

It’s scholarship time, and I’m always inspired by reading the narratives submitted by Native American students who apply for AIEF scholarships. AIEF stands for American Indian Education Foundation; it’s the educational program of National Relief Charities.

This year, I was particularly inspired by the clear determination that came across in Josefina’s story. This is what she had to say…

Ya’at’eeh, I am the Tobacco People, born of the Mexican Clan. My maternal grandparents are of the Many Goat Clan; my paternal grandparents are of the Mexican Clan. And this is everything that makes me Josefina B. I am a beautiful mixture of Mexican and Navajo values.

I am also blind in one eye and can’t walk a straight line to save my life, but I recommend that you do not underestimate me. I am an advocate against underage drinking and alcohol abuse. I am a Sun Devil from Arizona State University focused on becoming a social worker.

Originally from northern Arizona, I grew up on the Navajo Reservation where I was taught my Native language and traditions.

As a junior in high school, I planned to study architecture and design and build homes on my reservation. That summer, 2008, I was hit by a drunk driver. My skull was cracked open and after a two-week coma, I was told I’d never graduate high school and never walk again. Instead, I went back to school and in May 2009 walked across my graduation stage with a 4.0 GPA and ranked as #3 out of 600 students.

I refused to let the doctor rob me of my potential. I did not care that I was blind in one eye or could only use one hand – I am strong enough to help people on a mental level and that is what I plan to do with my life.

Thus far in college, I’ve volunteered with an intertribal club, creative writing group and a national youth leadership organization. My goal was always to create an environment where equality exists.

In my free time, I also volunteer with the at-risk population in Arizona, working through a Native American community service organization, a homeless shelter, a union high school district, and an urban Indian center.

Knowing that I make a difference in the lives of people is how I wake up every morning and what pushes me to become a social worker. The diverse people I assist inspire me to keep moving toward my goal. I only have a few...
semesters left before I can return to my home reservation as a fully trained and practicing social worker.

Native American students like Josefina and countless others deserve a fighting chance for a college education. For the 2013-14 academic year, AIEF awarded scholarship funding to 164 American Indian undergraduate students and 38 graduate students – all tribally enrolled Native Americans who dream of a college education.

We wish our AIEF scholars and students everywhere the best and encourage all of you to keep working toward your goals. It only takes a dream, hard work, and determination like Josefina.

“Everyone who is successful must have dreamed of something.” - Maricopa Proverb

Related Links:
American Indian Education Foundation:  http://www.aiefprograms.org