

To Whom It May Concern:

My Birth name is Chasity Mendoza, but I go by Chaz. I'm 23 years old. Before I entered the Start program, I was staying at a local shelter in Waterbury.

When I was born, I was removed by DCF at birth due to an unsafe environment. I stayed in DCF care until I was 6 years old. When I returned home, my living situation did not get better, as my father was still abusive towards my mother. By the age of 16, I was homeless and staying in local parks or crashing at friends' homes when possible. When I was 19 years old, I was able to get into a homeless shelter. While I was in the shelter, I found employment. The bus didn't run that far so I would ride my bike to work every day.

I was referred to the Start Program through The Connection, which is funded by the Homeless Youth Line Item in 2019 and was housed within a few months. When I started working with my case manager, I did not understand how much support I would receive. I thought she would find me an apartment and that was it. While I have been working with my case manager, I have completed a CNA course and soon will be taking the state exam. I now have my driving permit and am working towards my driver's license.

After some time in the program, I fell into a routine of cooking breakfast every morning and baking brownies on the weekend. It was a great feeling knowing that I had a secure place to stay every night. I have been able to maintain employment since being with the Start program. I am hoping that my job will turn into a permanent position. I finally understood my parents, as well as their exhaustion. I am very fortunate to have this opportunity to excel in my career and maintain stable living.

Thank you so much for continuing to fund this program through this homeless youth line item in the state budget. I really don't know where I would've ended up without this.

Sincerely,

Chaz Mendoza, Meriden