

Something that has impacted my life greatly is the fostering of my nieces and nephews. Although it was difficult at first, it has taught me things I will never forget. My brother, the father of my nieces and nephews has a mental disability which he has struggled with for many years. My brother couldn't be around for them and their mother had a severe drug addiction. They struggled with things that many people take for granted like having a place to call home, food on the table, going to school, and parents to look up to. It was extremely hard for me to see what they had to go through at a young age and recognize that these are problems people face everyday.

When I was in sixth grade, we got the news that all five of my nieces and nephews were being taken away and were going to be placed separately in foster homes. My mom and dad did everything in their power to keep my nieces and nephews all together and with us. When they began living with us, our lives changed completely. We had long days and sleepless nights trying to stomach the situation at hand. Hard and emotional days came. At the time it was difficult for me to wrap my head around it all because I was still young myself. I was asked to take care of them while my mom worked two jobs and my dad traveled out of town working to provide for all of us. Both of my parents barely knew English and so I was always filling out the paperwork and talking to the inspectors and social workers.

My oldest nephew Dominic was eight years old. I remember the first day they came to live with us, he asked my mom if he could get a haircut. He was being bullied at school for having long hair since he had no one to take him to get a haircut. Dominic and his sister Alicia struggled with school because they hardly went and had to be held back to repeat the grade. Out of the five of them, three were in school, Dominic, Alicia, and Bella. Because they didn't go to school very often, they always needed help with homework and I was always the one who helped.

My life changed drastically when they came to live with us. My day would begin at five every morning to comb Alicia's and Bella's hair for school. It was the little things that put smiles on their faces. They felt important and special when I would do these things for them. They were so happy to go to school with their hair combed, they never had anyone who cared to do it and now they did. Dominic was constantly getting into fights at school because he had anger issues and I would have to calm him down. We talked to the school about getting him a counselor and it helped him, he was learning how to control his anger in a healthier way. A lot of attention and love was needed to be given to my nieces and nephews to help them from struggling with their issues and we did just that to help them grow from this one instance in their lives.

The PB&J program also served as a great support for my nieces, nephews and I. I felt a sense of safety and relief to know that the PB&J program was there to put smiles on our faces and keep us entertained while we waited to be called up to see my brother who was detained in County jail at the time. After all the struggles my nieces and nephews endured and survived, they are no longer suffering. Although it was a very hard challenge to face, fostering my nieces and nephews taught me many things in life. I learned to really appreciate everything I have and never take it for granted. I am blessed to have the hardworking parents that I have and their endless support and love. I am beyond grateful to be healthy and able to go to school and learn and for having food on the table and to have a roof over my head. I thank God each and every day to be who I am and for having all that I have.

### **Aspirations for the future**

Ever since I was a little girl, my dad would ask me, “Angelica que quieres hacer cuando crezcas?” And my response always was, “Una doctora bailarina!” In elementary, almost every Friday, my dad would take my sisters and I to the buffet at the casino where a mariachi group would play. *El Mariachi Loco* was the song they would play when they got near our table. I would get up as quick as I could and start dancing. Occasionally my mom would come along. She’d laugh and smile like there was no tomorrow when I would dance. I rarely saw her do that. My dad would give the group a few more dollars and the next song would play and I would continue to dance, watching my mom smile and laugh. Seeing her smile made me want to make others smile.

In sixth grade, I joined Hermanitas, an all women's group striving to not only better themselves but the community as well. I began to do community service like food banks, gifts for children in foster care, gardening, and giving out supplies for school, clothes, and hygiene products to those in need. The one service that I will always remember is when we would go to a community garden in the warzone area of Albuquerque. We gathered fresh fruits and vegetables as well as other food that people donated and handed it out to families. A mother and her three children walked in. The smiles on their faces lit up the entire room as they picked up their basket of food. Seeing these families smile and knowing that I was part of the reason behind it, gave me joy and made me want to continue doing so.

Times like these are what made me realize my passion for caring for others and what led me into wanting to go into healthcare. Being a healthcare worker would not only allow me to help them physically but also bring them joy and give them a sense of security. Once I came to

the realization that this is what I would like to do, I worked effortlessly to reach my goal. I began to take part in any volunteer opportunity that was offered. One example is my time volunteering with El Centro De La Raza at the University of New Mexico where I volunteered as a receptionist contributing to helping serve an underprivileged community. Aside from volunteering I have attended multiple workshops regarding financial planning and resources that will ultimately help me through this process of becoming a healthcare worker.

From a young age, I wanted to help those in need and being a healthcare worker would allow me to do so. In the past I have taken some steps to work towards my goal and now have become more motivated to do whatever it takes. With hard work and dedication, I know one day I'll reach my goal of becoming a doctora bailarina who brings people joy.