



CONNECTIONS

Growing in Strength, Leadership, and Vision



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Working For CONNTAC

By Tomeka Williams

My name is Tomeka Williams; I am an Educational Counselor at Site 2 servicing the Hartford and surrounding towns. My experience as an Educational Counselor has been fun-filled and meaningful.

I truly enjoy my career and

knowing that the company I work for wholeheartedly represents and stands up to its mission statement "To promote and expand equal educational access and opportunity for Connecticut residents. CONNTAC advocates issues and provides support services for

residents from low-income, first-generation educational backgrounds to give them reasonable, realistic opportunities to succeed and be empowered socially and economically."

Working with a diverse population, many coming from different spectrums of life brings much gratitude. I've had the pleasure of meeting and assisting adults, high school students, counselors from Windsor, Bloomfield, A.I Prince Technical, Howell Cheney Tech, Weaver, Hartford Job Corps, Hartford Adult Education, clients coming from a halfway



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Working For CONNTAC

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house and many others. I assist them with the many free services we provide at CONNTAC FAFSA'S, FSA ID'S, Scholarship searches, Fee waivers, Financial Literacy, and Career Assessments.

"Life After Ged" was one of the workshops I conducted at Hartford Adult Education. I realized that the adult population would be a little different than the high school students; therefore, I revised my PowerPoint and made the workshop centered around Q/A questions and answers. Many adults didn't know what their plans would be once they receive their General Education. I spoke to them about the benefits of pursuing a post-secondary degree in college or a trade school and the FAFSA process and how we at CONNTAC are readily available to assist and walk them through this process.

The adults were highly engaged and had several questions that I was able to answer thanks to my

experience and the training I've obtained through CONNTAC. After completing the workshop, many adults filled out our application and scheduled appointments to have their FAFSA'S completed.

Another fascinating aspect of working at CONNTAC is the fieldwork we are allowed to do. That means we, as Educational Counselors do not have to sit behind a desk waiting and hoping clients will come to us. When the day is slow, we have the authority to go out in the field to gather potential new clients at high schools or organizations within the community of our servicing areas.

Last but certainly not least, one of the greatest feelings is the looks on the students, and the client's faces are priceless when we have assisted and completed our tasks at hand. To hear most say thank you and how

many didn't know how to go through the processes of completing their financial aid packages alone. Many of the clients I have assisted discuss how they didn't know what career path they should take; however, once we have them complete their assessment, they're made aware of what field to pursue. To hear the agencies say thank you and that they appreciate how we are helping and then turn around and invite me to come back out again is the fulfillment and an accomplishment in itself.



CONNTAC Annual Scholarship

By DeShayla Shelley, Assistant Director

Each February the Connecticut Talent Assistance Cooperative (CONNTAC) offers its annual scholarship to students pursuing or continuing their education. This scholarship, established by the Board of Directors many years ago was created to recognize students who have overcome obstacles to pursue their education. CONNTAC EOC is a nonprofit organization whose mission it is to provide support services for residents from low-income, first generation educational backgrounds and give them reasonable, realistic opportunities to succeed.

The scholarship, whose amount varies between \$500 and \$1000 is awarded to 10 CONNTAC clients from around Connecticut. In order to qualify for the scholarship, students must be low income and a first generation college student. Meaning their mother or father

cannot have a bachelor's degree. It also requires that the student must be continuing or enrolling in a post-secondary education institution for that year. The students must submit income verification as proof they are low income, a letter of recommendation from someone who knows their academic or professional work, a transcript from their previous or current institution, and a statement of intent. In their essay, the student should talk about their future educational and career goals as well as the institution they will be attending for the upcoming year. Another question asked of the students is to describe any specific obstacles they have overcome in their pursuit of postsecondary education.

CONNTAC's scholarship is unique because unlike other scholarships, it delivers a check directly to the student.

This helps the student tremendously. They are able to use the money for day-care, gas, or even groceries. Having extra money in their pockets can be extremely helpful and take the burden and stress off income for the student, if just for a little.

The scholarships are giving out each October at CONNTAC's annual Breakfast Meeting. At the event individuals from community agencies and local community colleges and state universities come together to celebrate the scholarship recipients. The awardees are able to share their stories and thank CONNTAC for the opportunity. To find more information about CONNTAC's Annual Scholarship, head over to its website www.conntacinc.org.

2018-2019 Scholarship Recipients



Jessica Allyn

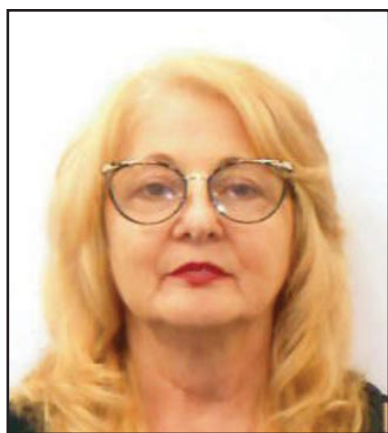
Attending Eastern Connecticut State University- CT

Field of Interest: Accounting

CONN TAC Representative: Gloria Dover

Jessica is a recent graduate of Three Rivers Community College and is currently in her first semester at Eastern Connecticut State University. At a very early age, a child psychologist told her mother that she would be socially impaired due to an ongoing custody battle. Hardships remained as she continued to live below the poverty line and was reminded of her mental and social challenges. Jessica explains that rising above the poverty level has been her goal, and studying Accounting has proved to be a way to reach that goal. She began to regularly

volunteer as a tax assistant with Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) at the Thames Valley Council for Community Action (TVCCA). Through this work, she helped underserved populations in the community by leveraging the skills she has gained in the pursuit of her degree. She expresses gratitude for her CONNTAC Counselor, Gloria Dover, for supporting her and showing her opportunities unseen on her own. "Gloria deserves more recognition for all of the support she contributes to our college. I am just one of many students blessed to have her in my life." Jessica says the scholarship will be a tremendous benefit by giving her the opportunity to focus on school.



Goulsina Becker

Attending Tunxis Community College- CT

Field of Interest: Visual Fine Arts

CONN TAC Representative: Erica Coleman

Goulsina's goal is to graduate from Tunxis Community College with a Visual Fine Arts degree, transfer to Central Connecticut State University and major in Art Education, to ultimately become an art teacher to children with disabilities. She is a single mother who came to the United States through the visa process. In pursuit of a better life, she and her son arrived with one suitcase, a lot of hope, and determination. She worked during the day and took classes at night to learn English.

Later, Goulsina suffered a work-related injury and was unable to work. During her time out of work, she soul searched and decided that she wanted to bring joy to young people through art. Goulsina is Vice President of the Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society, and is an active member of the Tunxis Art Club. She appreciates her CONNTAC Counselor, Erica Coleman, for helping her apply for financial aid and explaining degree requirements for her future career. Goulsina shares the scholarship will help her purchase art materials that tend to be expensive.

2018-2019 Scholarship Recipients

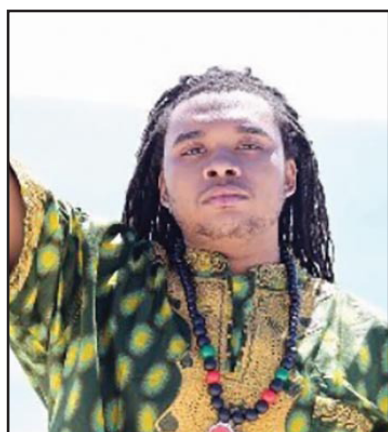


Shane Brooks

Attending Morehouse College- GA
Field of Interest: Computer Engineering
CONNTAC Representative: Gloria Dover

Shane is a Computer Engineering major at Morehouse College in Atlanta, GA. He chose Computer Engineering because he loves to problem solve and wants to increase the representation of African Americans in Engineering. Shane, his twin brother Shawn, and two younger brothers were raised by a single mother who taught them the foundation of hard work and sacrifice. He and Shawn, took on the role of setting good examples for their younger brothers having been raised by a working, single parent. During high school, Shane held the position of Treasurer of the Youth Council and NAACP. He also attended

workshops in Boston for Hearing Youth Voices to learn about restorative justice practices, black empowerment, and cultural diversity. Additionally, he interned with the Lieutenant Governor's campaign learning about policy and government. Shane was involved in athletics to include Varsity Football, Weightlifting, Basketball, Track and Field, and Wrestling. In addition, he has completed hundreds of hours of community service helping kids with their homework at the Drop in Learning Center, and volunteering with Students Against Destructive Decisions. College is the next step for him and will allow him to expand his horizons in many ways. He expresses gratitude to his CONNTAC Counselor, Gloria Dover, for informing him about financial aid, scholarships, and for assisting him with completing the FAFSA. Shane explains the scholarship will alleviate financial stress from his mother who is supporting two children attending college at the same time.



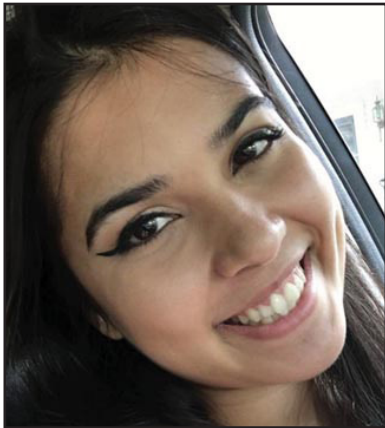
Shawn Brooks

Attending Morehouse College- GA
Field of Interest: Medical Sociology
CONNTAC Representative: Gloria Dover

Shawn currently attends Morehouse College with dreams of becoming a Medical Sociologist. As the oldest of four brothers growing up in a single parent household in New London, Connecticut, he expresses that he knew the odds were against him. In order to become successful, he knew he had to go to college and obtain a degree. He also intends to be a living testimony for all students in this country that their beginning circumstances do not dictate their future. Shawn held a strong GPA and was ranked in the top 10% of his high school graduating class. He was the President of both the Multicultural and More Than Words clubs. He

was Vice President of New London's NAACP youth council and a member of Hearing Youth Voices and the National Honor Society. Additionally, he was on the Soccer and Wrestling teams. He appreciates his CONNTAC Counselor, Gloria Dover, for assisting him with scholarships and providing insight to his family. Shawn says that the scholarship will be one of the best investments for his education and will alleviate financial burden on his family.

2018-2019 Scholarship Recipients



Zaha Bush

Attending University of Louisiana- LA

Field of Interest: Nursing

CONNTAC Representative: Gloria Dover

Zaha graduated with a commendable 3.97 GPA with her Associate's degree in Nursing from Three Rivers Community College. She currently attends the University of Louisiana-Lafayette pursuing her Bachelor's degree in Nursing with the goal of becoming an APRN (Advanced Practice Registered Nurse). Zaha describes receiving her education as always being a dream. She has faced many challenges, including, living in a world of poverty, domestic violence, physical abuse, health problems, and homelessness. She struggled a lot with no family, no support system, and limited transportation. Despite these trying times,

Zaha found the desire to make a difference in her community. She volunteered at the GNACC Healthy Living Festival, Medical Reserve Corps, St. Vincent de Paul Soup Kitchen, Navy Fleet & Family Support Center, and coordinated drives for personal donations and hospitality kits for the homeless. She is bilingual and speaks fluent English and French. She thanks her CONNTAC Counselor, Gloria Dover, for issuing college application fee waivers and for recommending resources, such as the local food pantry. "Supports like Gloria make it their mission to assist you and encourage you against all odds. I truly appreciate her support and guidance." Zaha shares the scholarship will help with costs associated with tuition, books, and fees.



Bryan Castro

Attending Sacred Heart University- CT

Field of Interest: Accounting

CONNTAC Representative: DeShayla Shelley

Bryan transferred from Norwalk Community College and is in his first semester at Sacred Heart University pursuing a degree in Accounting. As a child he witnessed his father battle alcoholism. His father's illness remained a critical problem for he and his mother the year he entered Norwalk Community College for the first time back in 2012. Severe financial constraints forced him to leave school in order to secure a full-time job. Bryan relocated to Florida with his mother for a short time where they were able to find work and affordable housing. With a better job opportunity for his mother in Connecticut, they moved to

Stamford. It became clear to him that he needed to have a college degree in order to achieve his professional goals. Bryan returned to Norwalk Community College in January 2018 as a full-time student and completed his coursework in 18 months with a 3.8 cumulative GPA. He credits his CONNTAC Counselor, DeShayla Shelley, for providing him with fee waivers and helping him navigate the college application process with no financial struggle. "DeShayla was very knowledgeable and even provided me with additional advice to carry on to my four-year school." Bryan shares the scholarship will help reduce the gap that remains with his college tuition.

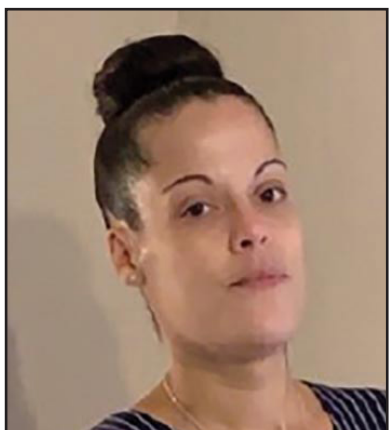
2018-2019 Scholarship Recipients



Christopher Huynh

*Attending University of Connecticut- CT
Field of Interest: Mechanical Engineering
CONNTAC Representative: Gloria Dover*

Christopher transferred from Three Rivers Community College and is enrolled at the University of Connecticut pursuing a Bachelor's degree in Mechanical Engineering. Growing up, he describes seeing both of his parents work extremely hard for things that they loved. Christopher recalls his mother working 12-hour shifts at a nail salon to take care of him and his brother. Simultaneously, his father spent his earnings on his addiction to cigarettes, alcohol, and drugs. In elementary school, Christopher remembers feeling left out due to having to take English as a Second Language courses. In middle school, he developed an addiction to playing games. The addiction progressively worsened in high school to the point where games were all he knew and thought about. He explains that he was addicted to the escapism and gambling aspects the games provided. His addiction to games ultimately led to the deterioration of his physical health and mental wellbeing. He appreciates his CONNTAC Counselor, Gloria Dover, for helping him realize the scholarships he could apply and for giving him great advice. Christopher shares the scholarship will allow him to focus on academics and internships rather than worrying about how he is going to pay for college.



Taisha Jurado

*Attending Tunxis Community College- CT
Field of Interest: Business Administration
CONNTAC Representative: Erica Coleman*

Taisha is a Business Administration major at Tunxis Community College with ultimate plans of assisting her brothers in running their own mechanic business. She is a single mother of two who was recently released from prison due to driving under the influence. Furthermore, Taisha has experienced additional challenges, including, fighting her addiction, losing her parents during an early period in her life, and domestic violence. She refuses to let these events define her. She is determined to achieve her goals, make a difference, and set an example for her children. She volunteered with the Waterbury Pop Warner Football League and participated in recovery events while working as a Medical Assistant for an addiction treatment center. She expresses extreme gratitude for her CONNTAC Counselor, Erica Coleman, for waiving the college application fee, assisting with the FAFSA, and encouraging her to apply for this scholarship. "Erica gave me the opportunity to register, begin classes, and become that much closer to achieving my goals." Taisha shares the scholarship will give her the assistance needed to afford taking classes and buying the necessary tools to further her education.

2018-2019 Scholarship Recipients



Saima Kousar

Attending Central Connecticut State University- CT

Field of Interest: Biology

CONNTAC Representative: Margarita (Daisy) Aiken

Saima is a Biology major at Central Connecticut State University with dreams of becoming a lawyer. Growing up in Pakistan, she was always passionate about her studies. She accepted a marriage proposal in the midst of her studies at the age of 19, which was normal for women in her culture. Saima describes being given promises from her family that she would be able to continue her studies after marriage; those promises turned out to be empty. Her marriage, she says, were typical of her cultural norms, where she was raising four children, trying her best to

be a good wife, giving up on her own dreams. Paying for college remains her biggest obstacle while in pursuit of achieving her goals. She expresses extreme gratitude for her CONNTAC Counselor, Daisy Aiken, for explaining how this scholarship helps nontraditional students like herself. Saima volunteers with the Muslim Coalition of Connecticut teaching, mentoring, cooking, and serving at Mercy Shelter. She also volunteers at Habitat for Humanity. Saima shares the scholarship will help pay for college tuition, as she pursues goal to become a lawyer and be the voice of so many who are oppressed like she once was.



Nathaniel Rose

Attending University of Hartford- CT

Field of Interest: Architectural Design and Technology

CONNTAC Representative: Allyce Pace

Nathaniel received his Associate's degree from Capital Community College and is in his first semester at the University of Hartford. After earning his Bachelor's degree, he plans to pursue a Master's degree to become an Architect with State of Connecticut. Prior to pursuing his college education, Nathaniel encountered numerous obstacles, including, being born with type 1 diabetes and living in an unstable household where he suffered abuse. He found a positive escape while attending school. It was there that he received support from others and

engaged in meaningful opportunities, such as, tutoring Math and Science, acting as Vice President of the Anime Club, and becoming a Student Government Association Official. He thanks his CONNTAC Counselor, Allyce Pace, for assisting him with scholarships and providing an ear to hear his story. "Allyce provided assistance swiftly and made my life much easier to handle." Nathaniel explains that the scholarship will assist with tuition costs and help to relieve stress of paying for college.

Educational Opportunity Center Professional Development Conference

By Juliana Barron, Educational Counselor-Waterbury

The EOC Conference was held in Worcester, MA at the Hilton Garden Inn Worcester, and the MassEdCO Office, on November 7-8. Every year the New England Educational Opportunity Association (NEOA) hosts a professional development event for the employees who work with TRIO Educational Opportunity Centers (EOC). The conference attendees include everyone from the New England area who help the adult population enroll into a postsecondary institution.

This event was held for two days but we all gained so much knowledge and made many connections during those two days. I thought this conference was going to be huge with a lot of people, but it was a manageable number of people, not too many and not too few. Would it be an official conference if we don't have an icebreaker? After registration, we started off the afternoon with an icebreaker. It wasn't your

normal icebreaker, we had to put our creativity and artistic skills to use for this icebreaker. We had to get into our state groups and draw an EOC 'superhero'. We drew and listed all the strengths and powers we have while working with EOC and serving our population. After we finished drawing our superhero, we had to present it and explain our strengths and images to the other EOC employees.

Speaker Myrone Morgan spoke about defaulted loans and the major consequences one can face when there is a failure to repay a loan. According to a 2018 report by the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, there are about 44.7 million Americans who have student loan debt. Many students take out loans for school but are not aware of what comes with taking out a loan. After hearing Mr. Morgan talk about defaulted loans, we learned about MassHire. Our speakers, Jeff Turgeon, Executive

Director and Debra Fera-co, the Sr. Program Manager for Central MA Workforce Investment Board, conducted this presentation. Although we do not work in the state of Massachusetts, it was still a worthwhile presentation, learning about resources and postsecondary options. They also talked about Workforce, American Job Centers, and training programs and the type of research we can do to find one in our respective locations. At the end of the evening we all had dinner at Revolution Pie and Pint. It was a good night to be out socializing with not only the CONNTAC employees outside of work but the other EOC employees as well.

Friday morning, we were at the MassEdCO Office and learned about Financial Aid: FAFSA, CSS Profile and FSA ID. Most of us do Financial Aid presentations and assist students with FAFSA applications, almost every month. Financial Aid is such a broad subject and

Educational Opportunity Center Professional Development Conference *(Continued)*

even when you think you know everything about Financial Aid there is something new you never knew about and learn. Along with FAFSA they discussed the CSS Profile, which is an application that is required by some colleges and universities. They showed us the

application process and explained the purpose of CSS and how it works. They also explained and talked about the Verification process and Estimated Family Contribution (EFC).

This conference taught me so much about student

loans and Financial Aid. I learned and gained so much knowledge while being out in Worcester. I also had the chance to be with CONNTAC employees outside of work and had a great time overall!



CONNTAC staff Tomeka Williams (far left) Erica Coleman, Imani Smith, DeShayla Shelley, Juliana Barron