

Family of the Year Award Recipient: Luis Cano

Growing up as a child of the state, I was raised in and out of foster homes with my three brothers. For many years I did not have someone that really cared for me as a child of their own. That was until my aunt and uncle fought the courts to raise my brothers and I along with the children they already had. My uncle took my brother and me, when I was just a boy, and since then he has cared for us like we were his own children. He has taught us right from wrong, how to think smarter, and the value of hard work. There is so much more that he has done, but the most important thing has been to encourage us to continue to go to school no matter what. Although I have faced several obstacles in the past two years as a college student, his influence has kept me going. I know without a doubt, that if not for his presence in my life, I would not be starting college this semester.

My family has and continues to support me through all my endeavors, not just by their words but their actions as well. Every day before I left for school, my uncle would ask if I had any money for gas or food and when I didn't, he was able to give me whatever spare change he had in his pockets. Because of him I was able to go to class knowing I wouldn't be stranded by an empty tank of gas or wouldn't be starving when I had a long day of classes. My uncle was able to spare whatever little money he had to make sure that going to school wouldn't take a toll on me, although it did on him. Another example of his unwavering support happened this past semester. I wasn't going to have the ability to re-enroll for classes because I was short a couple hundred dollars. For a couple hundred dollars, I was about to end my college career. For a couple hundred dollars, I was about to become a college dropout and be at a loss of what to do with my life. Somehow my uncle found out and went with me the next day to help pay the rest of my tuition. Without him, I would not be where I am today.

However, it's not just him that has made a tremendous impact on my life, it's everyone else in my family too. My mom (my uncle's wife) would call me during the day just to check up on me, whether I was studying or waiting for a class. Whenever she caught me studying she would encourage me to study hard. When I had a test, my cousins would text me wishing me good luck and told me that I was going to do well. These small actions encouraged me to be a better person and set an example for the young ones. In addition, there was even one time when my truck didn't want to start, so my parents took time from work to drop me off at school. I am entirely grateful for the love and support they have shown since welcoming me into their family. It's the little things that they do that spark my motivation to do well and make them proud.

At the end of the day, my family remains the stronghold that keeps me grounded and focused on my goals. I'm thankful for everything they have done and continue to do for me. No issue has ever been too big or too small for them to help me out. It is at times like this, that I think about what could have become of me had I stayed in the foster system. I am so thankful that, despite all odds, they decided to take me in and give me a home to call my own. With the support they have shown me, I have been able to start paving a future for myself; one that I never thought possible.