

Outstanding Alum

Abraham Rodriguez



Abraham Rodriguez participated in Kansas Kids @ GEAR UP (KKGU) from 2005 to 2009. He received his undergraduate degree in accounting from Wichita State. Currently, he is a business analyst for Koch Agriculture and Energy Solutions' Process Innovation Team. He is instrumental in transforming processes and leveraging technology to help people create more value for internal and external customers.

Rodriguez was selected as an honoree because he has demonstrated persistence and resilience. He worked hard and never gave up on his goal of obtaining a degree. Despite the obstacles and challenges he faced, he continues to be positive and has high expectations of himself.

Rodriguez states, "TRIO and GEAR UP were the catalysts that enabled me to become the person I am today." He further asserts that he doesn't know where he would be without the incredible mentors from those programs who invested in him and supported him during high school and college. "They helped cast a vision for my future, one that was much bigger than I ever would have dreamed for myself," he says. He goes on to say that if not for the people in TRIO and GEAR UP, he would not get to "work with incredible people, doing amazing things, learning more than I ever imagined and enjoying every minute of it!"

He advises students to challenge themselves and keep growing, to rise to the occasion in all that they do, and to try their best even when they don't feel capable or believe they have what it takes to be successful.

Rising Star

Lillie



KKGU has transformed the life of a student named Lillie by providing support, mentoring, networking opportunities, and elevating her collegiate goals. She has been in foster care since elementary school, and for most of her childhood, she has moved from one foster home to another. Just over two years ago, she joined her foster parents and their family and has since blossomed into a person with a purpose and clear future.

Lillie took advantage of mentoring, college advisement, volunteering, scholarship assistance, and campus visits to Fort Scott Community College (FSCC), Pittsburg State University and other institutions. Participation in KKGU activities and services has identified her as one of the most active former St. Francis foster care youth in Region 1.

Through her passion for learning and reading, Lillie maintains a 3.14 GPA and made the Marmaton Valley High School's National Honor Society. She stands to graduate ranked ninth in her 2017 graduating class of 21.

Throughout high school, music and faith have been a big part of her life. She has been accepted to play trumpet for the Greyhound's College Marching and Jazz and Performance bands at FSCC next year. Lillie plans to complete an associate of arts program and transfer to Emporia State University to pursue a secondary education major focusing on history. Her career plans are to teach in a high school setting.