

GREAT EXPECTATIONS: A STORY OF SUCCESS



**Great Expectations**

FOSTERING POWERFUL CHANGE

An Initiative of the Virginia Foundation for  
Community College Education



The Virginia Foundation for Community College Education  
Proudly Presents the

GREAT EXPECTATIONS INITIATIVE

## BUILDING THE BOND raising expectations



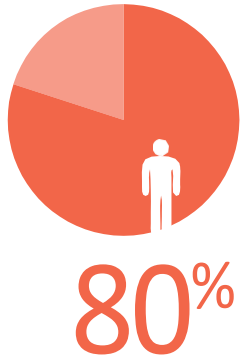
SILVIA GARCIA (PICTURED LEFT AND ON THE COVER), AGE 20, HAS SPENT FOUR YEARS IN FOSTER CARE. THANKS TO THE SUPPORT OF COACH VICKY (RIGHT), SHE IS IN THE PROCESS OF COMPLETING HER ASSOCIATE'S DEGREE AT JOHN TYLER COMMUNITY COLLEGE AND WILL BE APPLYING TO THE NURSING PROGRAM AND IS PURSUING HER DREAM OF BECOMING A NURSE.

“ In the little world in which children have their existence, whosoever brings them up, there is nothing so finely perceived and so finely felt, as injustice. ”

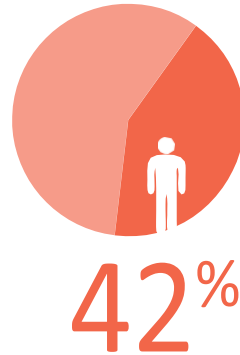
—Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations*

# FOSTER CARE SHOULDN'T MEAN FAILURE

Young people in foster care in Virginia typically arrive there because of abuse or neglect. Is this a reason to sentence them to a lifetime of poverty and despair? Presently, there are several thousand foster care youth and alumni in Virginia who are college-age. Hundreds more age out of care every year. Research demonstrates what we intuitively know: these young people's future prospects are grim.



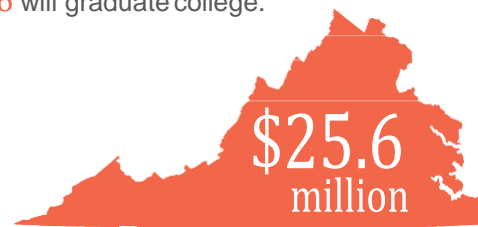
OF OUR FOSTER YOUTH WILL NOT ENROLL IN ANY EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS BEYOND HIGH SCHOOL



OF OUR FOSTER YOUTH WILL FAIL TO EARN A HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA

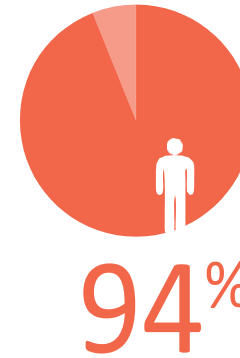
According to the Annie E. Casey Foundation, for every 100 young people who age out of the foster care system,

- 54 become homeless or lack dependable housing;
- 25 will be incarcerated within two years; and
- 6 will graduate college.



THE ANNUAL COSTS IN VIRGINIA FOR YOUTH AGING OUT OF FOSTER CARE WITH LOWER LEVEL SKILLS

Those who fail to finish high school have virtually no chance of earning a living wage. In fact, soon two out of every three jobs available in Virginia will require more than a high school education—bad news for the 94 percent of foster youth who won't get the higher education necessary to escape poverty. Great Expectations, with your help, is changing that in Virginia.



OF FOSTER YOUTH WILL NOT GRADUATE COLLEGE



Mandy is a Great Expectations Story of Success.

# MANDY & COACH CRISS

## LEARNING TO HELP OTHERS WITH SUPPORT FROM HER COACH

With support from Great Expectations coaches, Mandy graduated from Virginia Highlands Community College with an associate's degree in 2010. She has a job in her field, working at a juvenile detention center nearby. She's continuing her education through Old Dominion University's distance learning program at Virginia Highlands, and is close to earning her bachelor's degree.

**And she still turns to Great Expectations coach Criss Golden for support and advice.**

His encouragement when she was in the final months of her associate's degree program helped her keep her grades high and not get discouraged.

Along the way, coach Golden and the Great Expectations program have helped with utility bills and gas and transportation expenses, as well as trips to the bookstore—and return trips to the bookstore when she realized she bought the wrong books and had an assignment due.

Someone to talk to. Someone to share dreams with. Someone to help fill out the financial aid applications and college paperwork required for attending a bachelor's degree program on the opposite side of the state.

The relationship between coaches and students is a big part of the students' success, says Golden, who admits he "got butterflies" watching Mandy walk across the stage at graduation. "It was one of the happiest days" of his life.

Now married and in her first home, Mandy is a long way from the 15-year-old placed in foster care when her parents couldn't care for her. And through her job in the juvenile detention center, Mandy hopes that someday she "can make a difference in some kid's life," as her coach did for her.



“ Take nothing on its looks; take everything on evidence. There’s no better rule.

—Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations*

## BUILDING A BOND

The Commonwealth founded Virginia’s community college system to address the unmet needs for higher education and workforce training. Educating Virginia’s foster care youth and alumni is an urgent unmet need.

Great Expectations was created in 2008 as a partnership between Virginia’s community colleges and philanthropists supporting the Virginia Foundation for Community College Education. Great Expectation’s mission is to help young people leaving foster care in Virginia receive the higher education they need to succeed in life. Virginia’s community colleges offer them a feasible path to a four-year degree, a wide range of general and technical two-year degrees, or other workforce credentials that give them skills valued by employers. **Not surprisingly, 70 percent of foster youth who access higher education do so through community colleges.**

Great Expectations coaches reach out to foster youth and alumni in high school, helping them consider their career options and what community colleges have to offer. Together they explore the young person’s skills, values, and interests, and

match them to higher education options. They help with college applications and assist young people through the financial aid maze. Once a student has enrolled, coaches provide intensive, “high-touch” support to ensure these students’ success. This active support includes regular check-ins, curriculum advising, mentoring, tutoring, direct financial assistance in the case of emergencies, incentives for success, and peer connections through group activities.

**In its first year, Great Expectations operated at five of Virginia’s 23 community colleges. Today that number is 17, and counting. Great Expectations has served more than 1,200 youth since it began.**

Early results show great promise. Great Expectations is helping foster youth succeed. Great Expectations students are staying in school. College retention rates are almost twice those of foster youth nationally. Great Expectations students are graduating in stronger numbers every year. They are transferring to universities, including Ivy League institutions; beginning careers; and even supporting families of their own.



MANDY, PICTURED WITH COACH CRISS, IS 24 AND RECEIVED HER ASSOCIATE’S DEGREE FROM VIRGINIA HIGHLANDS COMMUNITY COLLEGE. SHE IS CURRENTLY WORKING ON HER BACHELOR’S DEGREE FROM OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY.



Jasmine is a Great Expectations Story of Success.

# JASMINE & COACH DEDRA

## SOMETIMES WE ALL NEED THAT EXTRA PUSH

Jasmine has always wanted to complete college. But without the help of her Great Expectations coach, accomplishing that goal would be—well, just not possible.

**Having a coach means Jasmine has someone to advocate for her, someone to talk to, someone to tell her, “Don’t give up.”**

Jasmine enrolled in J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College three years ago, when she left the last of eight foster homes and began the Independent Living program. Her social worker told her about Great Expectations, but at first she shrugged it off.

A year later, things weren’t so good. She was having trouble passing her classes due to a host of personal and family issues, including a continuing battle with depression. This time, the social worker personally took Jasmine to meet with Great Expectations coach Dedra Hampton, and they sat down together. Things started turning around.

The relationship they forged has helped Jasmine time and again. Last fall, facing some tough times and tempted to withdraw from a difficult class, she turned to her coach. She was out of medication—and had to wait weeks for a new appointment with a doctor.

“She told me, ‘Don’t withdraw from the class.’ She said, ‘Get to the doctor, get back on track with your medicine.’ She pushed me to keep that class. She’s awesome.”

Today, in her third time around with precalculus, she is getting top grades. She works for a dean at the college, and plans to continue her education at Virginia Commonwealth University in the fall.



“ I must be taken as I have been made. The success is not mine, the failure is not mine, but the two together make me. ”

—Charles Dickens, Great Expectations

# FILLING THE VOID

Who helped you apply for college? Who did you tell when you were hired for your first summer job? Where did you go for Thanksgiving during your college breaks? Who cosigned your first car note or lease? Who helped you through the ups and downs of life in the difficult transition years of early adulthood?

**The family connections that ground us, give us perspective and support, do not exist for most youth in foster care. They go at it alone all too often.**

Great Expectations coaches can help fill that void. These coaches are compassionate, dedicated community college employees who teach, guide, mentor, and challenge the youth they serve. They are caring adults who also have expertise in both the foster care system and higher education. These men and women are the magic that makes Great Expectations work.

The bonds they form with foster students are deep, rich, and transformative. They understand the difficult circumstances these young people face, and how these situations can interfere with students' success. Financial challenges abound, and the lack of family support often compounds the difficulties of daily living. Young people need ongoing support from a caring adult, and can especially benefit if that adult understands both foster care and higher education. This is what Great Expectations coaches bring to the table.



JASMINE, PICTURED WITH COACH DEDRA, IS 22, ATTENDS J. SARGEANT REYNOLDS COMMUNITY COLLEGE, AND IS MAJORING IN SOCIAL WORK AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE.



Thomas is a Great Expectations Story of Success.

# THOMAS & COACH VICKY



## A SUPPORT SYSTEM

Thomas is lucky to be in a stable foster home where he has been able to remain after aging out of the system. But this 22-year-old, a May 2013 graduate of John Tyler Community College, hasn't always had the stability he needed to achieve success.

Placed in foster care at age eleven, he went through ten homes, fifteen elementary schools, and four middle schools in just two years. And, even with supportive foster parents, he continues to count on Great Expectations coach Vicky Muensterman for weekly advice and support. Sometimes, that's the extra handholding he needs to accomplish a task.

"I don't always manage time too well," says Thomas. So, despite great success at JTCC and in his full-time job at Pennington Seed, sometimes focusing on the task at hand is difficult.

When he started a tough math class, Calculus 2, he went to Vicky with his first low grade.

*"She literally walked me down to the Student Success Center to get a tutor," recalls Thomas.*

And when he continued to procrastinate on filing the paperwork to transfer to Virginia Commonwealth University to continue his education in business, coach Vicky arranged for his college mentor to go with him to visit the university and talk personally with professors and a transfer coordinator there.

Having the relationship with his coach also provides opportunities he wouldn't otherwise have, such as traveling to Washington, D.C., to participate in a conference on transitioning foster youth.

"It's a support system, it's a second mom, it's someone to help keep me straight," he says.





“ It is not possible to know how far the influence of any amiable, honest-hearted duty-doing man flies out into the world; but it is very possible to know how it has touched one’s self in going by. ”

—Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations*

# EVEN GREATER EXPECTATIONS

Great Expectations has shown us how to save the future of children who have aged out of foster care. With your help, we can do even more. As Great Expectations embarks on its next five years, the program is pursuing three measurable goals to expand its impact in Virginia:

## 1. Hire more full-time Great Expectations coaches

Coaching works wonders when it is “high-touch” and relationship-based. Full-time coaches are more effective than part-time positions and can serve many more students. Great Expectations currently has a mix of both full- and part-time coaches, with the full-time programs consistently achieving the best results.

## 2. Double the number of students served

The abysmally low rate of college attendance and graduation among youth from foster care is an urgent crisis. Resolving it, however, is within our grasp in Virginia with Great Expectations. With adequate resources, we will over the next five years double the number of students enrolled and progressing toward degrees.

## 3. Graduate more foster care students every year

The number of Great Expectations graduates has grown steadily throughout its first five years, with over thirty-five students expected to earn a degree in 2013. We must do more—and we can. Great Expectations is working to help foster youth succeed at the same rate as other Virginia students, or better. Our first five years of experience have helped identify key barriers to success, such as academic struggles and financial challenges, as well as the solutions that work in overcoming them. Early and intensive tutoring as students make the transition to college level work has led to strong results on a pilot basis. Additionally, we know that many students who leave without a degree do so due to financial difficulties. Helping students make a workable financial plan and access all available resources can allow them to stay focused on academic success.



THOMAS, PICTURED WITH COACH VICKY, IS 22 AND GRADUATING FROM JOHN TYLER COMMUNITY COLLEGE IN MAY 2013. HE WILL ATTEND THE VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF BUSINESS.

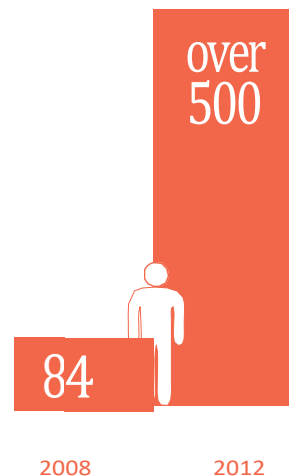
# AN INVALUABLE INVESTMENT, FOR ALL OF US

By the time a young person ages out of the foster care system, the taxpayers of Virginia have already spent tens of thousands of dollars supporting him or her. In fact, policy makers often refer to the phenomenon of the “million-dollar homeless person”—too often the cumulative public investment in a single youth before he or she turns 18, only for the youth to end up living under a bridge or behind bars.



**\$2,500**

IS THE COST OF THE GREAT EXPECTATIONS PROGRAM PER STUDENT TOTALING \$1.2 MILLION



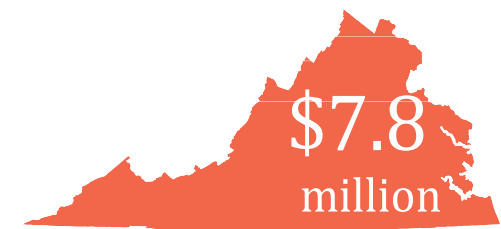
THE NUMBER OF STUDENTS ENROLLED IN THE GREAT EXPECTATIONS PROGRAM IS INCREASING

Some things never change: Thomas Jefferson warned in 1818 that if a society fails to educate its young people “they will be untaught, and their ignorance and vices will, in future life cost us much dearer in their consequences, than it would have done, in their correction, by a good education.”

Great Expectations is a modest investment and a proven solution to this challenge. Philanthropic support for the program is leveraging significant public investment in foster youth, particularly in partnership with the community college system.

IN HELPING VIRGINIA'S FOSTER YOUTH, GREAT EXPECTATIONS IS HELPING ALL OF VIRGINIA.

In giving these young people the knowledge and skills they need to have a future, Great Expectations is brightening Virginia's future.



GREAT EXPECTATIONS CAN SAVE OUR VIRGINIA ECONOMY \$7.8 MILLION IN ONE YEAR.





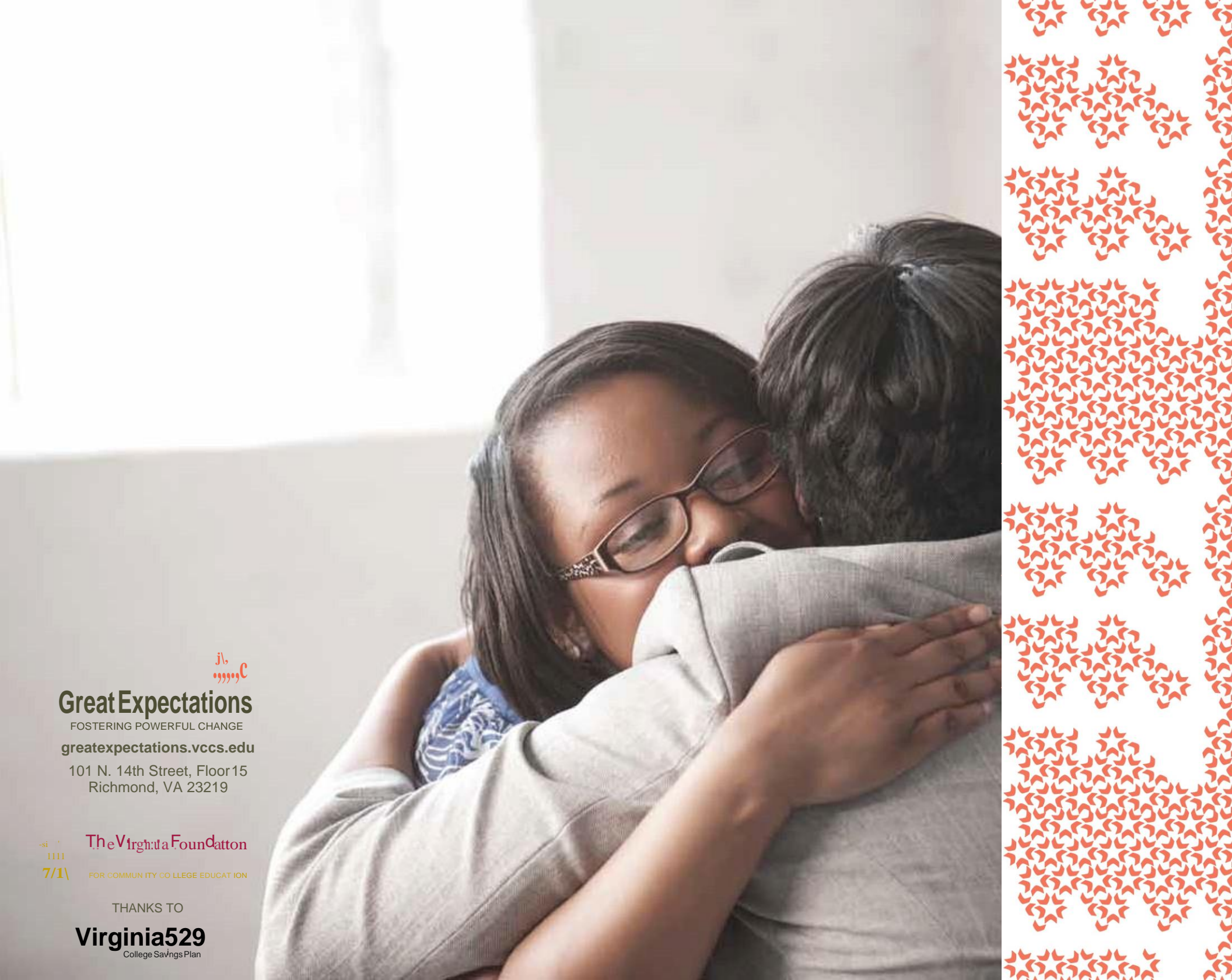
“Great Expectations expands educational opportunities and offers hope for a brighter future to an important group of deserving and disadvantaged young Virginians: youth transitioning out of the foster care system.”

— Anne Holton, Great Expectations Program Director,  
Former First Lady of Virginia

Traditionally, a foster youth's chance of finding a path to a successful future has been limited. Great Expectations changes that reality. The program helps foster youth and alumni overcome financial, academic and emotional obstacles to get the higher education they need to succeed in life through Virginia's Community Colleges.

#### HELP BUILD THE BOND: DONATE

For more information, please visit us at [www.greatexpectations.vccs.edu/give](http://www.greatexpectations.vccs.edu/give) or call 804-819-4950.



# Great Expectations

FOSTERING POWERFUL CHANGE

[greatexpectations.vccs.edu](http://greatexpectations.vccs.edu)

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The Virginia Foundation

FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGE EDUCATION

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