

# Destiny Can't Be Denied

by Jenny Rose Spauldo

*She came to the United States from Nigeria when she was only six. Today, thanks in part to the Take Stock in Children program, Destiny Ukachukwu is a shining superstar who lives up to her name.*



Despite being a smart, caring, and conscientious student, Esther "Destiny" Ukachukwu wasn't confident she would get into an out-of-state college. Imagine her surprise when she received her acceptance letter from Vanderbilt University, complete with a full-ride scholarship!

Although Destiny was surprised, those who know her certainly weren't. After all, Destiny is an outstanding senior at Seminole High School. With a 4.60 GPA, she ranks 37th out of 1,030 Seminole High grads. She's also one of six statewide winners of the Leaders 4 Life Fellowship 2021, which will give her funds for housing, meal plans, books, supplies, and computers during her college career.

Destiny says the Take Stock in Children program has done much to help her excel in her studies and beyond. The program offers mentorship, college success services, and opportunities to earn college scholarships to deserving, low-income youth. Destiny,

whose family migrated to the United States from Nigeria when she was six, joined the program while attending Sanford Middle School.

"Everyone there gives you awesome support," Destiny says. "They motivate you, help you, talk you through everything. You can also attend a lot of workshops, which are super helpful, especially for people with minority backgrounds, who may not know as much about the American education system."

Monica Tipirneni, who began mentoring Destiny in her junior year at Seminole, says she's not only an exemplary student, but also an inspiring human being.

"She's a very grateful, motivated, calm, collected individual," Monica says. "She's done extremely well and is just amazing."

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When Monica was asked to mentor Destiny after her previous mentor moved away, she hesitated at first. She wasn't sure if she could keep up with what she thought would be a huge time commitment.

But it turned out that being a Take Stock mentor was much easier than she imagined – and much more fulfilling.

"It's really not taxing on the mentors, and yet I feel it's very rewarding, not only for the students, but also for us," she says. "It's lovely to be a part of someone's success, to see the students aspire to great things."

Monica couldn't be prouder of Destiny's success and can't wait to see what she does next. Destiny, in turn, plans to keep in touch with all her Take Stock mentors and leaders while she pursues her college dreams. For her, the relationships she has forged through the program were just as important and even more precious than the academic support.

"At the end of the day, how you interact with people, who you are on the inside of your soul, that's what makes you vibrant as a person," Destiny says. "That's something truly amazing, and I don't take that lightly."

Destiny's soul certainly shines with warmth and generosity. When she's not studying, she volunteers at Harvest Time International in Sanford and at Nativity Catholic Church's soup kitchen. One of her favorite ways to serve is by baking for the homeless during Christmas and Thanksgiving.



"Destiny" Ukachukwu with her Take Stock in Children mentor, Monica Tipirneni. With Monica's help, Destiny graduated with a 4.6 GPA and earned a full-ride scholarship to Vanderbilt University with extra money for room and board.

Her hobbies include art and music, but even those activities are ways Destiny serves. She launched her own nonprofit company, Destiny & Co., so she could sell her paintings and drawings and donate the profits to charities. And she founded Art Therapy, which provides music therapy for those who aren't at their peak mental state. Her more than 350 community service hours

also include a project she started called Happy Hygiene, which provides personal hygiene products for the Ronald McDonald House in Orlando.

Destiny plans to continue helping others as she pursues a degree in human organizational development at Vanderbilt's Peabody College. Her dream is to eventually open affordable clinics across Sub-Saharan Africa that would offer advanced healthcare to women and babies.

For students looking to join the Take Stock program, Destiny offers this wise advice:

"Learn how to trust yourself and your capabilities," she says. "Don't doubt yourself. When you get into that negative state of mind, and you're constantly second-guessing yourself, it's hard to make any progress at all. Find confidence in yourself to do better and say, 'I can do this,' because that's truly what will help you grow."

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