

## YOUTH HIGHLIGHT

### Meet Briana



*Briana with Orangewood board chairman, Greg Dunlap (left), and CEO Chris Simonsen (right)*

Spending your teenage years in foster care can be difficult. That was the case for Briana, a remarkable young woman who, as she says, has gone from “foster child to foster advocate.”

Briana was just 10 years old when her father died of cancer. Her mother struggles with mental illness and when Briana was 12, she had to be placed into foster care because of her mother’s abusiveness. For the next six years, Briana moved from home to home, a total of nine in all. She aged out of foster care at 18.

When she became pregnant, she turned to Orangewood Foundation for help. Orangewood accepted her into our transitional housing program. She attended therapy, and got back on her feet. At Thanksgiving and Christmas, Orangewood provided holiday dinners and made it possible for her son to receive a bike on Christmas morning.

Today, she is in her last year of college (thanks in part to Orangewood Foundation scholarships), raising her son, and is a freelance web designer. At a time

when she’s focused on her bright future, she’s also chosen to remember her past and give back to those still in foster care or struggling to make the transition from care to adulthood.

A few months back, Briana was in a personal development leadership program and the class had to select a charity for a service project. “Our goal was to create some goodness in the world,” she says. “I’m a bit shy and quiet and not one to assert myself. **But I was able to get passionate and courageous in sharing how Orangewood Foundation made a difference in my life.** The result was that the class selected Orangewood as our charity.”

In just three short weeks in September and October, Briana and her classmates leveraged the contacts of their network and raised over \$51,000 for Orangewood’s COVID Emergency Relief Fund. They also donated 86 care packages containing toiletries and inspirational notes, 25,000 face masks, and 120 Halloween costumes. Briana estimates that almost 500 individuals contributed to the campaign.

“With COVID-19, more foster kids are unable to go to school and have that socialization,” Briana notes. “In general, more people are isolated. This is going to have an effect on the mental health of all of us, especially foster youth. My intention was to create that support for them and for the donors and volunteers to have the opportunity to join in.”

Briana adds, **“Orangewood is an organization that I have seen show up for me and I know that they show up for other youth in similar ways.”**