

## **2022 Avesta Housing Educational Scholarship Winners**

### **Meredith Bolduc: Southern New Hampshire University**

My biggest educational goal is to graduate from college so I can have a career that will support my family, help others, be personally satisfying, and allow for a balanced lifestyle. As a single mom, paying for college has been a huge source of stress and created so much question as to whether school is even an option. I would be so grateful for this scholarship because it would mean less need for student loans and it would lessen the financial barrier that stands between myself and following through with this life-changing decision. It would motivate me and make it possible for me to take that next step for my family's future.

Living in an Avesta Housing community, specifically Brick Hill Townhouses, has given me the foundation and stability that I needed to be the best mom I could be and it has put me in a position that I feel encouraged, motivated, and able to return to school to earn my Bachelor's degree, which would be both hugely personally rewarding and a bridge to a career that could support my family and allow me to be a productive member of a community that helped me so much along the way. Living here has given me the dignity, independence, and confidence that I feel allowed me to become who I am today. I believe being in this home that I am so very proud of and being surrounded by such a supportive community has inspired me to actually want to take the next steps to earn my degree and dream bigger, which I had all but given up on over the course of some challenging years. If I could do anything to change my community in a positive way it would be to lead by example on a daily basis by being a helpful and respectful neighbor, doing my part to keep shared spaces clean and maintained, and always looking for every opportunity to keep our community a beautiful and safe space for our families to grow! Positive change comes from having pride in your environment and in yourself and I would love to do my part to give that gift to each and every one in my community!

Hands down the experience of being a mother to a special needs child has influenced my life the most and had the greatest impact on who I am today. The process of grieving the life that I expected my child to have and acceptance has been truly humbling and the fact that I can say that everything that has brought us to this moment happened exactly how it was supposed to is a testament to the growth that comes from such an experience. Being his mom has given me the greatest purpose and taught me so much about myself and about life. Far from every moment has been flattering or positive, but from the darkest moments has come strength, humility, and the greatest of life's lessons.

### **Oumalkaire Omar: Howard University**

My educational goals consist of getting my Bachelor's degree in finance and then obtaining my Master's degree. During my academic journey, I want to become more financially literate to help those around me reach a certain level of financial literacy. However, the road to obtaining my degree and ultimately making a difference in this world is plagued by financial barriers. This scholarship will facilitate the road to getting my Bachelor's degree by removing yet another financial barrier. One of the long-term objectives I hope to achieve with my education is familiar and yet so needed: change. My vision for change is to create lasting opportunities, policies, and institutions to secure financial

stability in my home country Djibouti for generations to come. For decades, financial inequality has played an essential role in perpetuating a cycle of poverty, social inequity, and corruption. I want my efforts to secure financial stability to enable Djibouti to move forward as a nation and create social reform. My education plays a monumental role because without education, those aspirations lack substance, and sustaining success becomes less probable.

My family and I first arrived in the U.S in 2014. At the time, not only did we not speak English, but we also did not know a single person in Maine. My Avesta Housing was the first place I lived where I truly felt at home. I was surrounded by an amazing community where neighbors were not just neighbors; they felt more like uncles, aunts, and cousins. This fantastic community changed my life in a few ways. They helped make the United States feel like my home at a time where 17-year-old me felt out of place in this new country.

As an immigrant, my Avesta Housing community has helped make me challenge boundaries and fight for what I want. It has made me want to give back to the communities I am part of. The network of individuals I have had the pleasure to get to know through Avesta Housing played a considerable role in my decision to create lasting opportunities, policies, and institutions to secure financial stability in my home country Djibouti. Similarly, one of my goals in the near future, when I graduate and get a stable job, is to create several yearly scholarships of about \$1,500 for prospective college students that are part of the Avesta housing community. I want this fund to be my way of giving back to the Avesta Housing community. Given a chance to change this community for the better, I would ensure that there are more community nights and events where members of the Avesta housing community can get to know one another. These events would be an excellent opportunity for residents to get to know each other and also get to know the staff who work so hard to make Avesta Housing an enjoyable place to live.

One of the most impactful experiences I have ever had was traveling to the United States from my home country. This experience was the first time I got to see a world beyond Africa. It was scary, exciting, tiring, and lastly, it made me angry and hungry for knowledge. It was a pivoting point in my 14-year-old life. During this 32-hour journey to the U.S., I felt humiliated, looked down upon, and powerless because my family and I did not speak English. Everyone seemed to speak English at the airports; navigating these environments was very hard, mainly because people were not helpful and seemed very annoyed every time my mother would try to ask a question in her broken English. Something as simple as ordering food or asking for directions had become an impossible mission. I had never felt so powerless and angry at my ignorance. Looking back at it now, it is crazy how this journey made me the person I am today. As a reader, it might feel insignificant or very ordinary, but this was not the case for my family and me. The feelings that I had during that journey are why I work so hard now. My experience at that time made me hungry for knowledge, so I will never feel the way I felt back then. This is why I work hard in school to sustain a 4.0 GPA and try everything in my power to help young immigrants succeed in assimilating to the U.S. culture and achieving their academic and career development goals.

### **Johan Sifa: Champlain College**

Ever since I was a little girl, I have always had a passion for helping others and at times it would cost me. Nonetheless, the more I grow, the more I realize that that is who I am. I am a second-year International Business major at Champlain College and one of my future goals is to be able to travel

the world and offer my help. Some of these goals include working in partnership with a non-profit in order to help children and adolescents especially in the educational level and I truly believe that not only will my major (studies) open doors of opportunities but my love and passion for the wellbeing of the future generation will fuel me. Furthermore, this scholarship will help me achieve my educational and career goals. With the exorbitant costs of tuition and many demands, I have not been able to secure a job which then puts a strain on my parents. I am however planning to work during my undergraduate degree, but I do wish to focus a lot of my time on my studies. This scholarship will help by lowering the costs of college and the amount of hours I'll need to work throughout my studies. This way, I'll be able to continue with my academic achievements. It will also give me time to find an internship which shall be a plus considering my major.

When we first got into our very first Avesta Housing, my family and I were going through a tough time and having found a place to lay our head gave us strength to keep going. I do not recall a time in other houses I've lived where maintenance cares for the house as much as those living there. Moreover, the very fact that there is a scholarship available for Avesta Housing tenants is proof enough for me that Avesta is doing all they can to change lives. Lastly, I think that organizing gatherings among communities would be nice. I believe food and music are positive ways hearts can be changed and it would be very unique of Avesta to do that.

If I were to speak about some of my experiences (especially life-changing ones), I may have to write a novel. There are a few things that have changed me and one that particularly comes to mind is when I used to work for Cultivating Community. This was my first "job" and we were tasked to plant, grow, and deliver food. This was in the summer and Maine's heat can be unbearable at times. I honestly hated it at first. The labor was hard and I usually felt tired by the end of the day. The delivery of food however was my favorite part. You see, after planting and growing, we cooked the food (or at times just packed the fruits and vegetables) and delivered it to elderly people. The smiles on their faces was breathtaking! I felt like I was part of change and that through me, my colleagues, the organization, lives were being changed. This is to say that through this job, I realized just how much people around us need help. Now, I am more than happy to lend a helping hand. By the end of the summer, I decided this is the kind of work I want to be part of. All in all, the biggest influence this had on me is that I strive to make my community better in the little ways. Truly the saying "a little goes a long way" has become a reality for me.