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**Vivian Afocha Serves as Student Speaker at Northwestern College’s 112th Commencement!**

**[Bridgeview, Chicago-Jefferson Park & Rosemont, IL]** Northwestern College conducted its 112th Commencement Ceremony at the Arie Crown Theater at McCormick Place in Chicago. This year’s ceremony featured two students who addressed their class, including **Vivian Chinwendu Afocha** of Chicago’s north side and **Xavier E. Carl Poole** of Blue Island. Vivian majored in Criminal Justice while Xavier double-majored in Executive Accounting and Business Administration.

Focusing on ***Vivian Afocha***, she presented a heartfelt address to her fellow graduates and all those assembled, emphasizing that you can do anything if you put your mind to it! Using her own story as an example, she showed how an immigrant from Nigeria - alone in a new city with no friends, family or job - could take a chance on herself, enroll in college and set her own path for success. Two years later, and now also a United States Citizen, she stood before them at commencement with her Associates Degree in hand.

Vivian, 20, primarily grew up in Lagos, Nigeria where she and her older brother and sister were raised by their father after her parents divorced when she was just five years old. While in Nigeria she attended boarding school before eventually moving to the United States and settling in Dallas, Texas when she was in her teens. There, she lived with her mother and attended Lake Highland High School where she graduated early in 2014 while only in the 11th grade. Despite hopes of entering college, her young age was a disadvantage to her, for sadly, her high school provided her with no higher education assistance; their focus was on graduating *seniors*, and she was just a junior. Without having applied to colleges, Vivian didn’t have a plan for that first year out of high school. So with a love of traveling and a desire to experience a new environment, she picked up and moved to Chicago in hopes of going to college, getting her Bachelor’s Degree and one day having a career in the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI).

In Chicago, Vivian was in a city where she knew no one. She had no friends or family for support, and she was unemployed. But she saw it as a new beginning to strive for success. While in Chicago, Vivian first attempted entrance to City Colleges of Chicago, but at the time she sought to enroll, they were already three weeks into the semester and told her she’d have to wait till November to start. She expressed her desperation to start school right away, so they recommended Northwestern College, for its next start date was late September. She had been familiar with Northwestern College and remembered seeing ads for it, so that was the path that she took. In fall of 2014, Vivian entered Northwestern College as a Criminal Justice student!

“All successful people have a motivation,” Vivian explained during her commencement speech. “That motivation can come from a belief, a philosophy, or a family member.” In her case, she explained, it was her Nigerian father. He compared Vivian to her cousin who obtained her Bachelor’s Degree at age 20, challenging her to strive to be an achiever like her cousin. Her mother in Texas further challenged her throughout her life, even in simple ways. When Vivian would ask to borrow a dollar, her mother would remind her how she had gone to school and studied hard to *earn* that dollar.

Vivian started boarding school in Nigeria when she was 8 years old, and it was her time spent there that engrained the importance of strong discipline and of following rules and regulations. She likened her boarding school experience to the military, for they woke early, did chores, said daily prayers and went to classes. This engrained her with solid time-management skills. According to Vivian, classes were hard and the material vast, requiring her to study a great deal of material though she was only tested on a fraction of it. Thus, it was here that she learned discipline, and never to give up.

At 18 years of age and alone in a new city, Vivian surrounded herself with people who would help and support her in achieving her degree. Her parents were far away, and while her brother and sister were able to help her a bit financially, Vivian built a new network that she could lean on for support. First and foremost, she happened upon long time Northwestern College employee Brenda Williams who became her staunchest supporter. Vivian’s personal network grew quickly, comprised of her classmates, friends, and faculty and staff at Northwestern College. Beyond Ms. Williams, she found support from Associate Professor Cathleen Philbin, her Academic Advisor Jackie Morales, and so many of her classmates. What Vivian soon realized was that this support network had become much more than that – they had become *family*.

“These people watched after me like I was part of their family and I am so grateful,” she professed. Without them, she said, getting her education would have been much more difficult.

Standing at the podium before her graduating class, Vivian was truly the proof her fellow graduates needed that taking risks was worth it, for the benefits far outweighed the sacrifices made!

With her diploma in hand, Vivian is heading back to Texas where she has been accepted at Sam Houston State University. She will start classes in August and intends to earn her Bachelor’s Degree. But with her Northwestern College education complete, she hopes to start using that Criminal Justice Degree immediately and is currently seeking employment with the Texas State Department of Corrections. Thus it is evident that Vivian still maintains her original goal to complete her education and enter into a career with the FBI, having armed herself with the foundation she built in Chicago and at Northwestern College!

**About Northwestern College:**

Northwestern College (NC) is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission, 230 S. LaSalle St., Suite 7-500, Chicago, IL 60604, (312) 263-0456, www.ncahlc.org. The college offers focused career-oriented associate degree and certificate programs with flexible schedules and a supportive faculty. Day, evening, weekend, online classes and online programs are available. More information can be found at www.NC.edu or by calling toll-free (888) 205-2283.

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