

As she approached high school graduation, Lacey knew she wanted to go to Eastern Kentucky University but didn't know how she could afford it. Although some members of her family had attended community colleges, it was important to her to do more. "I wanted to be successful in life – that was my pure goal: I have struggled all my life to get the things I have; I wanted to go to college, and I wanted to be successful. And I knew the way to do that was to get more education."

Lacey appealed to the government and ECU for financial aid. Within the process, however, she was forced to defend her circumstances. She had to write letters stating why she should be considered an independent student and have others submit reference letters as well. Lacey did receive the approval and graduated with the Class of 2003 from Nelson County High School.

Now at age 20 and a sophomore at ECU, Lacey says it is not as difficult to be an independent student. "It's easier because I feel like everyone is like me now, everyone has now gotten to my level, where they actually do have to do everything on their own. They wake themselves up and they have to do everything I had to do all through high school. I feel like I'm not all by myself anymore, like I'm normal."

Lacey is not the average college student, however. She is very active on campus. Last year, as a freshman, she was the president of her co-ed residence hall, a member of the Residence Life Council, and a member of the Baptist Student Union (BSU). Lacey also raised her GPA to a 4.0 and is a part of the honors program.

The scholarship she receives through the honors program pays for her books and half of her tuition. While continuing to be a part of BSU, Lacey has taken on new endeavors, including a community service sorority, Christian Fellowship, and working as desk worker in a residence hall.

Lacey's love for people and for helping them is undeniable – and the reason behind her decision to major in public relations. Her goal to work for a non-profit organization.

Her passion to give back has been fashioned greatly from her hardships in high school. "The community and the people in my church also helped me get through my struggles because they always gave me helping hands – and it didn't matter if it was ever given back. They are just proud of the accomplishments that I've done today, and that's how I paid them back: just making them proud."

Relying on others is something that Lacey has had to learn. "Never give up – there's always support. Even though it's really hard as a person to ask for help, it's vital. I would not be here today if I didn't ask for help or if I didn't depend on some people in my life... you also need to be independent within yourself to know what you can and cannot do. And if you cannot do it, then you need to ask for help." 📖



Stefanie Burnett

Age: 20

Graduated from: Knox Central High School, 2002

Now attending: University of Kentucky

Class and Major: Junior, Merchandising

Background: Put into foster care at age 9 and lived with various family members until permanent placement at age 14. Junior year of high school hospitalized for health concerns due to depression. Finished school with 4.0 GPA, graduating 13th out of 170 students

"You need to be able to focus and really put a lot into being able to deal with things and then still make the grade in the class that you need to. It can't help you to worry so much while you're in the classroom about what's going on outside of it.

"No matter what anyone else tells you, no matter how many times you fall or fail, keep trying because it's worth it. It's going to be worth it in the end just to accomplish something you know you can do.

"It's very important that you have self-motivation to get through the obstacles and just keep your head up. Believe in yourself."



Lacey Morgan has overcome her setbacks to achieve her goal of gaining a college degree. She now attends Eastern Kentucky University and is majoring in public relations.