

# First Longview Buckner Family Pathways mom earns college degree

May 31, 2017

LONGVIEW—Stephanie Fletcher's grandmother was her best friend. She could tell the family matriarch anything and receive wise council. Her grandmother always was there for her.

That's why Stephanie needed to be there for her grandmother in her time of need.

In 2011, Stephanie's grandmother was diagnosed with congestive heart failure, which led to a five-year string of heart-related health problems. She struggled with blood pressure issues, then diabetes. Finally, she had open-heart surgery.

Through it all, Stephanie was there for her grandmother, often living with her so she could take care of her around the clock.

"She had to have somebody there at all times to help her," Stephanie said. "She got to the point that she had so many medications, she couldn't remember which ones she took. Then she got to the point she needed help getting around at all times."

## **Putting dreams on the back burner**

Taking care of her grandmother meant putting some dreams on the back burner. She wanted to go to college, but between working full time, raising her son and caring for her grandmother, Stephanie had little time. She squeezed in online courses when should could, but her son and her

grandmother were her priorities.

In January 2016, her grandmother died.

“My grandmother and I were really close to each other,” Stephanie said. “I could tell her anything. I have my mom. I have my son. They mean the world to me. But my grandmother was the glue that held the family together. She even gave my son his middle name. It was a very difficult time.”

### **Determined to continue education**

In the aftermath of her grandmother’s death, Stephanie was determined to continue her education. Her grandmother encouraged her to keep working at it, and Stephanie wanted to honor her grandmother as well as do something for herself and her son.



Stephanie Fletcher seeks to set a good example for her son, DeVondre. She discovered a new program in Longview—Buckner Family Pathways, a residential program for single-

parent families that provides housing and child care assistance so single parents can be empowered to attain their educational goals. It was everything Stephanie wanted, and she was one of the first women selected for the program.

“That was a blessing,” Stephanie said. “It was meant for me.”

She continued working hard and increased her course load. The academic hours she’d already earned put her ahead of the other women in the program. On May 12, she walked across the stage of Kilgore College, the first Buckner Family Pathways resident in Longview to earn a college degree.

“I enjoyed it so much,” Stephanie said. “It was overwhelming. I was really in shock that I got to that point. I had a good time. It was so much fun. I’ve gotten my degree. I’m ready to move on to the next part of my life. I’ll never forget it.”

#### An inspiration to others

In a celebration of her accomplishment, several Family Pathways mothers told how Stephanie inspired each of them. They’ve seen the hard work she put in to make this happen. They know they can do it as well.

“She’s been an inspiration to the other ladies,” said Kimberly Clough, program director for Family Pathways in Longview. “She encourages others when they go through tough times. She picks them up and helps them keep going. She’s always the encourager and the motivator. She’s a leader in general.”

Hearing their words was moving.

“It means a lot to me,” Stephanie said. “I didn’t shed any tears in front of y’all, but I did when I got back home. “

Clough said Stephanie is the ideal resident to earn the first degree through the program. Her hard work and positive attitude set the standard for other residents.

“Stephanie has been amazing,” Clough said. “She came in very focused, very dedicated. She’s always the first one to register for classes and take care of her schedule. She’s doing what she needs to do. She’s very focused on her goals.”

Her influence goes beyond the classroom.

“She’s always there for her son, DeVondre,” Clough said. “She’s always there for his events. She volunteers at his school. That’s very important to her. She wants to be there for him.”

With her associate’s degree in criminal justice in hand, Stephanie already has enrolled at the University of Texas at Tyler, where she’s seeking a bachelor’s degree in the same field. She continues in the Family Pathways program.

She hopes to continue inspiring single mothers along the next steps of her journey.

“It means a lot that I’m a single mother who did it,” Stephanie said. “I can show other single mothers that they can do it.”