



This Passionate Student is Planning Her Future Her Way, Thanks to Academies



Person of Interest. Fingerprint analysis. Crime scene investigation. Most people recognize these terms from their favorite detective show. But for Zoyii McDonald, these terms are a part of her education everyday as a senior in high school.

Zoyii attends McGavock High School in Nashville, Tennessee and is a student at the Academy of Health Science and Law, one of the Academies of Nashville through the Metro Nashville Public Schools. The academy partners with local businesses like BNA, the local airport authority; the local police department; and Summit Medical Center to work with students and teach them career skills related to criminal justice and law enforcement.

A student in the Law Enforcement pathway, she has a dream of going to college, studying law and criminal justice, and making her since childhood dream come true: becoming a lawyer. "My career choice is driven by my love for persuasion and argument. When I feel something is wrong, I speak up. I hope to correct injustices in the criminal justice system and make a difference in peoples' lives and bring justice, not only for the guilty, but for the innocent as well."

Not only does Zoyii know what she wants to achieve, but academy learning has helped her outline a roadmap. "My goal is to attend Tennessee Tech University in Cookeville, Tennessee and major in pre-law or English with a minor in criminal justice, finish college in four years, go on to grad school, then intern at a law firm, pass the bar, and get employed as a lawyer," she says without hesitation. "It's going to take a lot of college work, a lot of schooling, and it will probably take the next eight to ten years, but I'm ready and plan to do it."

The academy experience has helped Zoyii become stronger in her core academics. "One of the weakest subjects for me is science, and I've been motivated to get mentors and people to tutor me. That's one of the things the academies help promote: to get help when you need it."

In addition to encouraging scholastic achievement, the students are taught teamwork and problem solving skills that will be crucial in their chosen field.

"We've learned a lot about teamwork. It makes you a better person. It feels good to contribute to a group of people who count on you. Teamwork is an essential skill I know I'll need throughout my life, including college. We've learned how to work as a team and use problem solving skills, for example, how to investigate and secure a crime scene. We've done things like look through clues, evidence, and fingerprint analysis to solve a case. That's the kind of problem solving we do here in our academy."

Through their business partnerships, the academy students have won over \$18,000 in scholarships through various criminal justice competitions. "We appreciate the people who come in to help us. They support and help us win those competitions. I've made great friendships while participating. It's a great learning and bonding experience."

It was Brad Tracy, an instructor at the academy, who saw the potential in Zoyii and encouraged her to try new things, including the criminal justice competitions. "When I first met Zoyii she was a shy, introverted young lady who had just moved here from out of state," he says. "I began getting her involved in different programs, much to her chagrin. Zoyii has since competed in several events and won several awards and scholarships. She is now recording advertisements for radio and television. (Zoyii was one of three Nashville Academy students selected to participate in a series of radio and TV ads in cooperation with Ford Motor Company and Nashville Ford dealers through the Ford Next Generation Learning program.) Zoyii has not only surpassed all expectations, but continues to challenge herself in becoming the best person she can be in every aspect of her life. "

Zoyii says academies have given her a self-confidence she didn't have before. "I always thought I was a loner. When I started at my academy, my confidence was shot. I've gained so much over the past three years. Winning first place and receiving a \$6000 scholarship the first year I competed, boosted my confidence. It got me out of my comfort zone. Now I'm more confident and able to speak to people in public places. I know I can do anything I can set my mind to."

She recognizes the value of academies and recommends the experience. "My academy is a door opener. All I have to do is walk through it. With academies, you have so many opportunities to achieve your wants and goals. All you have to do is take the first step to benefit yourself. Academies help you plan your future your way. That's what makes learning in an academy-based school so special and unique.

"I actually love coming to school," she says. "I know that in the long run, school prepares me for my future. I'm dedicated to coming to school every day, to learn what I can so I can be successful in life. To have an academy is a blessing. Every student should have a chance to be a part of one. I would highly recommend it to anybody. Academy's the way to go."

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