

THE ORANGE
DUFFEL
BAG INITIATIVE™

our journey
together!

Winter 2016-2017



"Six years ago we had a dream to provide young people who are homeless and foster care tools and guidance to be successful, happy and self-reliant. **You helped make that dream a reality and changed forever the lives of more than 750 Georgia youth in need!** Thank you!



As you celebrate the holidays with your loved ones and give thanks for the abundance in your life, we hope you will continue to support the growing number of less fortunate teens with a **donation** to **Orange Duffel Bag Initiative (ODBI)**.

For example, a \$400 gift will match the USG Board of Regents GEAR Up!* grant for a homeless or foster student to receive ODBI services. A \$50 gift will cover the cost of workbook materials for one student and a \$25 donation will provide an orange duffel bag for a student who successfully graduates our 12-week program. **Any amount will be greatly appreciated.** Go Team Orange!"

Echo Garrett and Sam Bracken, ODBI Co-Founders



"Every student we serve is a gift."

"When students come to us, we know they are special and that they have greatness wrapped inside. Each week a little of the wrapping peels away until at graduation a beautiful, talented and self-confident young person appears. **Every student we serve is a gift.**"

Luis Castro, ODBI Lead Coach

A gift like ODBI Class 26 graduate C.L

C. L. is an incredible young person who excelled in gymnastics and studied ballet for 10 years, starring in the *Nutcracker*, until she entered foster care at the age of 14. During her 12-week transformational ODBI journey, she embraced her passion and talents for the first time since coming into custody.

"With Orange Duffel Bag, I learned a lot about myself and who I am. I learned and noticed that the choices I make do affect me. It also helped me with school. When I first started the ODBI program I skipped school a lot; now I don't. I also learned to lighten my load by letting go of the past because all it is doing is holding me down. I also learned I need to love myself for me, not for who I want to be."

C. L. now has a plan for her future and is on track to graduate high school.

And ODBI Class 26 alum S.B.

S. B. is a brilliant young person who discovered within herself love and gratitude. **"Orange Duffel Bag really made me take a further look into my future. It has changed my**



perspective on life, broken barriers within me that I was afraid to break and helped me gain a new self-confidence." S.B. wants to be an English major with a goal of becoming an author.

She delivered with poise and confidence during Class 26 graduation a poem she'd written about her journey with Orange Duffel Bag. There was not a dry eye in the room, including the manager of her group home **Youlanda White**. A few lines from S. B.'s poem:

"When I first came in [the program] I didn't want to be here. But now as I'm leaving I'm trying my hardest not to shed a couple of tears. This organization has made me change my perspective and lighten my load. I did this all by following the 7 Rules for the Road."



Coach Robin Crawford (pictured above center) facilitated Class 26 sessions alongside Coach Luis, meeting with the high school students from Metro Atlanta on the campus of **Atlanta Technical College**. Coach Robin shared with a smile following graduation on November 19, "Class 26 faced some challenges, but I also witnessed the **biggest breakthroughs to date.**"



Class 26 participants were committed to a transformational journey of self-discovery and education planning!

Among those who recognized and celebrated each ODBI grad's success during the graduation ceremony was **Kathleen Edwards**, GA Department of Human Services Independent Living Specialist, working with young people in care 14-17 years of age.

"The students were an inspiration to watch grow on their journey," said **Shakur Walker**, Class 26 youth advocate. Shakur was joined by **Jeana Brown** and **David Burns**, as well as **Charlie Holmes**, a longtime ODBI Macon advocate. Class 26 is a collaboration with **GA Department of Human Services Independent Living Program**.



Special thanks to **all** of our coaches, program managers and advocates for changing young lives in 2016! Coaches: **Aaron Wright, Sandi LeMieux, Audrey Taylor and Tameka Williamson**. Program Managers: **Scott Patrick and Malcolm Paterson**. Advocates: **Marj Economopoulos, Kathy Eickhoff, Becky Davis, Linda Angio and Donna Barnes**. Photos courtesy of Shakur Walker.

THE NEED: The number of youth who are homeless and in foster care, unfortunately, continues to grow each year by the hundreds. Please help a youth in need succeed! To donate: <http://www.theodbi.org/donate-now/>



* **University System of Georgia received its first Statewide 7-year GEAR UP Grant from the US Department of Education.** GEAR Up! partnerships and state matching grants are inspiring examples of communities taking a stand for excellence and equity in education and student success. The matching grant partially pays for at-risk high school students to receive ODBI programs. Please join us in this effort and help us raise the funds needed to serve these students.

Did you know "gifting" stock has become a popular way for investors to be charitable to their favorite cause?



Before **December 31** arrives, decisions about charitable giving should be finalized to take advantage of year-end tax savings. There is an advantage to gifting your favorite charity an appreciated stock. Instead of paying capital-gains tax on what the stock has gained over the years, you can gift it to a charitable cause like ODBI and avoid paying capital-gains tax. A win-win for all!

ODBI is Independently Audited each year. Financials show we maintain our benchmark and best practices in that more than **85 cents of every dollar donated goes to programs serving our students!**



The

Orange Duffel Bag Initiative
1801 Peachtree Street NE Suite 300
Atlanta GA 30309
<http://www.theodbi.org>
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The Orange Duffel Bag Initiative (ODBI) is a 501c3 public charity that improves the outcomes and education success of high school and college students who are homeless, in foster care or experiencing high poverty.
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