



# Angels in Adoption®

## Cristina Miranda's Story (2016 Angel in Adoption® Honoree, CA)

*"Nobody enters the field of child-welfare in search of accolades and acknowledgement. I for one, entered the field because of my personal experience with Foster care, and my strong desire to make it better for others."*



Cristina Miranda's childhood was deeply touched by circumstances requiring the skilled, compassionate intervention of social work and advocacy. Her adulthood has been fiercely devoted to giving back to that social mission.

Cristina's first encounter with CCAI's programs was in the summer of 2012, in the Foster Youth Internship Program®. Born and raised in Ventura County, CA, a place she still calls home, for some of the most pivotal years of her life, Cristina didn't have a permanent home. Cristina was placed in foster care at the age of 14 for four years. Separated from her sisters during her teenage years, and placed in four different high schools; an experience that would disrupt any student's educational experience, but even more so with a child in foster care, Cristina struggled and began to lack confidence in herself and her academic achievements. She began to doubt her ability to graduate, and the experience drew her to become negative about her future.

CCAI assisted in changing that, and her experience as a Foster Youth Intern completely changed Cristina's life. She found out about the Foster Youth Internship Program® in 2011 and began doing some research on the organization. At the time she was working in the same shelter home where she had been placed in while in foster care. She began seeing new possibilities in using her experience to initiate positive change and asked her boss if she could apply to the Foster Youth Internship Program®. Cristina's boss eagerly encouraged her to apply. She was thrilled to find out she had been accepted into the program and started to make plans for her summer in Washington D.C.

Immediately, her fellow Foster Youth Interns and the CCAI staff made her feel like someone believed in her, that they saw something in her even though she was initially so nervous to apply and take on this challenge.

*"The experience was life-changing. All the individuals I went through that program with are all over the United States, doing amazing work, getting their masters, and law degrees; they're advocating for children who don't have a voice."*

The Foster Youth Internship Program® sent Cristina's life on a different trajectory, one that she never imagined, and one only made possible by CCAI. *"We actually felt like Congress was listening to us, after spending so much of our lives feeling like no one else did."*

Cristina considers CCAI the nation's leading think tank on foster care and adoption policy, able to navigate these issues on the micro and macro level, while putting their attention and personal touch where it

matters most – the children and families. She was grateful for everything the program offered from the big picture of lobbying on the Hill to the tiny, daily details, like shopping, meals, and learning how to dress professionally. She was linked with a mentor who she still keeps in touch with and also keeps in contact with staff who she credits the experience with bringing her to where she is today.

**In 2016, U.S. Representative Julia Brownley recognized Cristina as an Angel in Adoption®, making her the first of the over 200 alumni of CCAI’s Foster Youth Internship Program® to receive the Angels in Adoption® Award.** Cristina says that participating in the 3 day event of the angels and adoption program was invigorating, *“I am grateful for the opportunity to have spent 3 days angels from all over the country! And I am so honored to have been recognized as a 2016 Angel in Adoption by my Congresswoman, Ms. Julia Brownley and the Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute! There are so many other individuals much more deserving than I am- still I am so humbled and honored by the recognition. Nobody enters the field of child-welfare in search of accolades and acknowledgement. I for one, entered the field because of my personal experience with Foster care, and my strong desire to make it better for others. But it seems as if the effect has been reversed. Throughout this journey I have been blessed to meet and serve countless young people, whose resilience and tenacity inspire me every day.”*

After her experience as a Foster Youth Intern with CCAI in 2012, Cristina received a Master’s degree in Public Policy and Administration and went on to collaborate with state and local stakeholders to pass legislation and implement policies that make sense for the children who will be most directly impacted. Cristina is using her experience from the child welfare system and her knowledge of the education system to create opportunities for children who are often forgotten. For those youngsters who are still in the foster care system, Cristina is a beacon of hope. Through her daily actions and work, she is showing them that there truly is a light at the end of the tunnel. According to a mentor, Cristina *“passionately defends the right of foster and homeless youth to live lives free from stigma. She lovingly and firmly nurtures these same young people to reject their stigma, overcome the prejudicial obstacles society places before them, and reach for their own vision.”*

Today, Cristina is the Family Engagement Services Coordinator at Child Development Resources of Ventura County Inc. and a mother to a nine-year-old daughter, and happily, has the full support of her family. She is also completing her Doctor of Education in Leadership, Administration, and Policy at Pepperdine University.