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**Trustees’ honoree overcame addiction, HIV**

Jolene Ford easily could have given up when she was diagnosed with HIV in the late 1980s and struggled with years of clinical depression, alcoholism and drug addiction. Instead, she enrolled in college, regained her self-confidence and committed herself to helping people affected by HIV/AIDS.

The Sacramento State graduate student’s fortitude will be rewarded Tuesday, Sept. 24, when she receives a $3,000 California State University Trustees’ Award for Outstanding Achievement. The ceremony at the Chancellor’s office in Long Beach will honor Ford and other CSU awardees who have overcome tremendous life challenges to pursue a college degree. The award is funded by the William Randolph Hearst Foundation.

Ford’s HIV infection stemmed from a blighted blood transfusion she received as a high school student during spinal surgery. Told in 1987 that she had several years to live, Ford spun out of control. She spiraled from being a gifted student who graduated from high school at 16 to an indifferent one who made bad decisions. “I finally got my life back on track and returned to Sacramento State in 2010 to pursue a master’s degree in social work,” says Ford, who recently shared her personal story in a book project to inspire and support others diagnosed with HIV/AIDS.

Ford’s commitment fuels her volunteer work at Sunburst Projects, a nonprofit that supports families and individuals affected by HIV/AIDS. As a volunteer medical case manager, she has committed more than 300 hours to helping people in the HIV/AIDS community manage social obstacles and medical issues, and recover from emotional hardships.

Her client list ranges from a 15-year-old boy to a woman in her mid-60s. Ford has a knack for relating to a broad clientele because of her experiences. “Sunburst’s weeklong summer camp in Livermore for 45 students and some parents enables counselors to make an ever greater personal connection,” she says.

“I have found my passion working within the HIV/AIDS community,” she says. “And I know that, no matter where I end up after graduation, I will always be ... providing whatever support I can offer.”
After Ford earns her master’s next spring, she plans to make a career of helping people in need. Her dedication and determination underscore why she was selected as Sacramento State’s representative for this prestigious annual honor.

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