



Jemima

Jemima grew up in Arizona as one of six kids, with a mom — her “rock and shining star” — who worked the night shift as a nurse. She thought of Stanford as her super-reach school, and applied in secret, in part because she worried about stressing her mother out about the cost of college. She expected any university to be too expensive, until she got in and realized that Stanford’s need-based financial aid program meant it would cost her almost nothing to attend. Opening her financial aid letter, she realized that “it’s not just possible to go to Stanford, it’s the financially responsible decision,” she says. “It was a lifting of a burden.” After graduating with a bachelor’s degree in human biology, Jemima is now a resident assistant and teaching fellow at a boarding school for first-generation, low-income students of color.

Stanford University



Jenny

Jenny Tiskus completed her Stanford application on a public library computer. As a low-income student in Polson, Montana, she assumed that going to college out of state would be “catastrophically expensive.” When she got into Stanford, however, she learned she’d have to pay almost nothing to attend — and that the university would even cover the cost of studying abroad. “I had this world-opening experience,” she says. “I got a chance to take part in a life I thought I couldn’t have.” Jenny has benefitted from Stanford’s financial aid programs twice: she is now attending Stanford School of Medicine, free of charge, and hopes to become a physician. “My access to education has meant that the world has opened up to me,” she says. “I can’t imagine being luckier than having both of these opportunities in the same lifetime.”

Stanford University



Cameron

Cameron Buzzell comes from Neah Bay, Washington, where his mom is an intake clerk, his dad is a fisherman, and “everybody knows everybody.” He was motivated by family and community to get a good college education—but knew his parents wouldn’t be able to contribute to covering the cost. “I had a little doubt in myself knowing the acceptance rate at Stanford,” he says. “After I got accepted, it was pretty much a guarantee that I wasn’t going to need to pay for anything. I haven’t needed to take any loans out, so I’m expecting to graduate debt-free.” He feels it’s his duty to help kids like him from back home, and mentors them to find their way to college.



Holly

Tracie and Mickey Hernandez met working at the Monterey County Sheriff's Department and immediately clicked. A couple of years later, they had Holly, got married, and had twins. Tracie always knew she wanted to be able to provide two things for her kids: braces and a good education. But as her oldest daughter approached the end of high school, she began to worry that she wouldn't be able to afford the cost of college. "Financially we just weren't in a position to contribute," she says. "We're trying to make ends meet, just like everybody else." Tracie's advice to parents in similar situations is don't lead with a 'no' – there are ways to figure it out. "The doors that were opened to us by the university were huge."