

**ALIYAH**  
**CHICAGO STATE**  
**UNIVERSITY**



 **CHICAGO, IL**

**Partnerships to STEP-UP  
in Health Careers**

## The past doesn't determine your path

**Aliyah grew up in the South Shore neighborhood of Chicago. The area is known as “Terror Town” for the rampant gangs and gun violence that plague the streets. Despite the harsh conditions outside, Aliyah was surrounded by a supportive family. Her grandmother gifted her with these words of wisdom: “It works, if you work it.” Over the years, this mantra guided Aliyah to persevere through adversity and help her achieve her dreams. All she needed was a little assistance, which she found through the HPOG program at Chicago State University, [Partnerships to STEP-UP in Health Careers](#).**

After high school, Aliyah attended Southern Illinois University in Edwardsville, IL. It was an exciting time. Being away from home was challenging both academically and culturally, but she was happy for the change. The new experiences gave her what she needed to escape the hardships she grew up with and pursue her goals. Unfortunately, due to financial difficulties two years into her studies, she dropped out of school and returned to Chicago. She was right back where she started.

Aliyah got a retail job but wanted more; “I was fed up with being stagnant in life,” she recalls. During her job search, she stumbled upon a flyer for an upcoming HPOG orientation. She attended the session and was randomly selected to participate. For Aliyah, it was a sign.

Getting accepted was only the first step. Aliyah faced many challenges as she enrolled in the Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) program at Chicago State University. She struggled to maintain stable housing, and faced transportation issues as well. In addition, Aliyah had trouble controlling her emotions in high-stress situations. Knowing these issues would negatively affect her career if she didn't address them, she sought assistance from her HPOG Case Manager. Aliyah persisted and succeeded as HPOG helped her overcome these challenges. “There were many times that I felt discouraged, but I endured and stayed focused on my goal,” she says. HPOG also provided her with supportive services such as housing assistance, transportation assistance, and work readiness training.

Aliyah completed her training in December 2019. She passed her state exam in February 2020 and now works as a CNA in the surgical trauma unit at Mount Sinai Hospital. She earns more than she did in retail and more importantly, she is happy and hopeful for the future. She hopes to continue her education, and wants to open her own birthing center one day. Her dream is to provide better reproductive health options to the under-served communities of Chicago's South Side. Aliyah is well on her way to achieving whatever she sets her mind to.

**“When I discovered  
HPOG, I found my path.”**

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