

## Valedictorian Speech

My name is Leah, and I am proud to have achieved my high school diploma through Abiona Centre school. Being a young mother to a daughter has inspired me to persevere through hard times. Despite not finishing high school at the average age, I am now pursuing post-secondary education with the support of Abiona Centre. My daughter has given my life new purpose and direction.

Living at Abiona Centre and attending its school has provided a second chance for a better life for both me and my daughter. I come from a background of abuse and challenges within the foster care system, having been apprehended 12 years ago. I've lived through multiple foster homes and shelters. Additionally, I have survived domestic violence, and I want to stress that abuse is not love. Everyone deserves gentle, kind, and compassionate love.

My journey included periods of homelessness despite being adopted into a supposedly loving home. The birth of my daughter was a turning point, giving me a new reason to live and strive for a better future. I hope to inspire others to never give up and to continue striving for a brighter future.

I am grateful to my classmates, teachers, and housing staff for their positive impact on my life and my daughter's. I leave you with my favorite quote by George Eliot: "It is never too late to be what you might have been." Congratulations to all graduates and students today. Thank you for allowing me to share my story and inspiration.

