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## Student Spotlight 2024

### The Atkinson Family

Henderson, NV



With a home full of love, laughter and new beginnings, Patrick and Aimee Atkinson have created a haven for their children, which includes a mix of biological, adopted and foster children. When the Atkinsons first dove into foster care seven years ago, they could not have imagined the journey it would take them on as they opened their hearts and home to children from diverse backgrounds and often difficult circumstances. The AAA Scholarship Foundation (AAA) has been a key resource for their family, providing their children with the educational options needed for their unique needs and abilities.

Originally from California, Aimee moved to Nevada when she was a teenager. She welcomed her first daughter Lou Lou, now 24, from a previous relationship, before meeting and eventually marrying Patrick, a native of Indiana. The couple soon welcomed a daughter, Aubrie (14). After two tubal pregnancies set a roadblock in their plans to expand their family, Aimee and Patrick opted to become foster parents, a choice that has led to fostering 21 children to date.

Just weeks after becoming licensed foster care parents, a special boy would enter their lives: Jonah, a newborn who had been abandoned with hyperthermia, sepsis and head trauma. He spent the first three weeks of his life fighting to survive in the NICU.

“Although I was not a first-time mom, I was so nervous about bringing him home because of his medical needs,” says Aimee. “But he immediately won over our hearts and we knew we wanted him to become a permanent part of our family.”

That wish came true when they finalized his adoption a year later. He is now a happy, healthy and thriving 6-year-old.

The AAA Scholarship Foundation became a part of their story when Aubrie was in 4<sup>th</sup> grade. For most of her elementary years, she attended an area public school and did well in school. However, as she grew older, the Atkinsons noticed a change in the school environment, including some negative behaviors among her peers. Additionally, while Aubrie received high scores on a gifted and talented assessment, they felt that she needed a more challenging academic environment. They found the perfect fit at Lake Mead Christian Academy, and a scholarship from AAA made it possible for them to afford the tuition.

Now in the ninth grade, Aubrie is excelling in school, maintaining a 3.7 GPA even with the challenging curriculum. She loves to read – so much so that she’s known to sneak a few extra pages in during class sometimes. She loves to be outdoors enjoying activities like fishing and has a wide range of interests – from marine biology to architecture and art.

“Aubrie has always been a very motivated child with a goal,” says Aimee. “She even saved enough money to buy a used car that we plan to restore for her to drive when she is older! Seeing her blossom at Lake Mead makes us feel confident that we selected the right academic environment for her. We are grateful that AAA made that choice possible.”

When it came time for Jonah to enter Kindergarten, the Atkinsons knew that Lake Mead would be the right fit for him as well and a AAA Scholarship made it possible for him to attend. “He has overcome so much, and he needed to be in a learning environment that could address any struggles he faced and give him the opportunity to thrive,” says Aimee. “Lake Mead checks all the boxes and is giving him a great start to his education.”

The Atkinsons currently have four other foster care children living with them – including Junior (5) and his little brother Christopher (3), both of whom they hope to adopt in the future. When Junior came to live with them, he had a strict individual education plan (IEP), but once enrolled in Lake Mead, also on a AAA Scholarship, he bloomed and is now excelling in both math and reading.

“Serving as foster parents has been both beautiful and heartbreaking at the same time,” says Aimee as she reflects on their journey. “We have had a lot of beautiful moments, and it has taught our children to have compassion and understanding for others.”

One thing that has helped to lighten the mental load for Aimee and Patrick is being able to send their children to a school where they can learn in a safe and nurturing environment, something that would not have been possible without AAA Scholarships.

“Part of the reason we got involved in foster care was to change the world for the better...to help give children a better life,” says Aimee. “By having a partner in the AAA Scholarship Foundation and its donors, it makes that goal much easier. I hope the donors realize that their support is helping to change the trajectory of so many children’s lives. We are so grateful!”

### **About AAA Scholarship Foundation**

*AAA Scholarship Foundation promotes the advancement of education by administering educational choice programs. The typical AAA Scholarship student is an ethnic minority living with a struggling single parent/caregiver in a high crime community. More than 80 percent of these children are initially awarded AAA scholarships while living in households with annual incomes at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty level. Many are either below grade level, failing at their previous school or both when they first receive a scholarship. Parents, who find their children in these circumstances and are concerned about their future, look for viable options. They seek an atmosphere that challenges their children and will reverse inadequate learning, social patterns and potential lifelong negative impacts. They wish to change their children’s learning environment, acquaintances and the unfortunate predictable outcomes associated with school failure.*

*AAA Scholarships are funded in Arizona, Florida, Georgia and Nevada by companies that redirect a portion of their state tax liability to the AAA Scholarship Foundation in exchange for a dollar-for-dollar tax credit. AAA Scholarship Foundation is one of the only 501(c)(3) nonprofit scholarship organizations approved to administer these legislatively-authorized tax credit scholarship programs in multiple states. AAA Scholarship Foundation provides your company with the convenience and efficiency of a single solution for participating in multiple state tax credit scholarship programs. For more information, or to learn how your company can participate in the program, visit [www.AAAScholarships.org](http://www.AAAScholarships.org), or contact Kerri Vaughan at [kerri@aaascholarships.org](mailto:kerri@aaascholarships.org) or 888-707-2465 ext. 730.*