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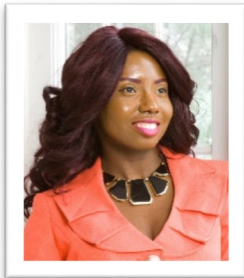
**CALOPTIMA EMPLOYEES AWARD TWO SCHOLARSHIPS
TO MEMBERS PURSUING HEALTH CARE CAREERS**

Local winners include a doctoral candidate and college-bound high school senior

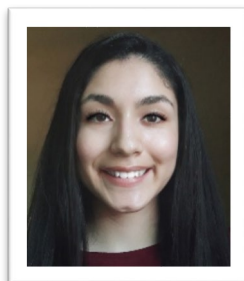
ORANGE, Calif. (December 21, 2020) — To add a bright spot to the end of a challenging year, CalOptima employees voluntarily contributed funds to sponsor two member scholarships in CalOptima’s fifth annual Scholarship Essay Contest. Members pursuing higher education in the health care or social services field were eligible for a \$750 award, one each for a current high school senior and a current college student.

In their essays, members were asked to share how they have benefited from CalOptima’s services, how their current studies will help them in their chosen career and why they are a good candidate to receive the scholarship.

Meet the scholarship winners and read an excerpt from their essays below:

**Gift Nleko, a second-year marital and family therapy doctoral student
at Alliant International University (AIU)**

“As a Nigerian-American refugee with a disability, I know what it’s like to need and not be able to find a culturally sensitive and communally relevant therapist. Hence, I am more understanding of individual differences in clinical practice, making it easier to communicate with a larger group of clients. With the support of CalOptima’s scholarship, it will be possible for me to continue my education at AIU and be closer to attaining my dream career as a doctorate Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist to dedicate my life to helping others.”

Janelle Franco, a high school senior from Anaheim, who plans to major in linguistics

“I am forever grateful for CalOptima and its dedication and assistance to help low-income families like my own during challenging times. My goal is to pursue a degree in linguistics and become a pediatric gastroenterologist. I believe words and language help people build relationships, and that is good for providers to develop empathy for their patients. Empathy is paramount in science and health care.”

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“The care and compassion CalOptima employees have for members is remarkable,” said Richard Sanchez, CalOptima Chief Executive Officer. “Their generous donations to the scholarship program will have a lasting impact as Ms. Nleko and Ms. Franco obtain the knowledge and skills they need to ultimately become our health care colleagues. I appreciate our employees’ kindness and wish our winners the best as they continue their educational journeys.”

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About CalOptima

A county organized health system, CalOptima provides publicly funded health care coverage for low-income children, adults, seniors and people with disabilities in Orange County, California. CalOptima’s mission is to provide members with access to quality health care services delivered in a cost-effective and compassionate manner. In total, CalOptima serves nearly 800,000 members with a network of 9,000 primary care doctors and specialists as well as 40 acute and rehab hospitals.