

CHERY OFFERS HELPING HAND, SUPPORT



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A woman walks into the Educational Opportunity Program office at the Angell College Center with a mission. Her face ridden with concern, she searches the room with her eyes and suddenly she sees Mama Esther. She's the person who won't judge her, the person who will listen to her. With her soft voice, demure nature, undivided attention, and her most used question, "Are OK?," Plattsburgh State student Esther Chery is the epitome of a "Mama."

If you ask Chery to describe herself, she would say she's a "people person," which isn't hard to figure out since her major is human development and family relations. But like most college students, she didn't always know that she was going to be in that program.

Her Haitian background had some part in that. Chery said her family expected her to hold a prestigious job title, such as a doctor and a lawyer, so she started her college career as a biology major. When she realized she was more people oriented and found out about the human development and family relations major, she decided to switch. Her new major was a perfect balance between her love for the sciences and her love for public health. The hands-on experience she receives outside of class through her major has helped her find her niche.

"At first, I wanted to work with children, but I've seen that I have so much fun with the elderly. That's the age group I want to work with," Chery said.

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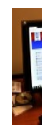
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The caregiver in Chery is something that stems from her upbringing. Having been brought up by a single mother and her grandmother, Chery learned the importance of supporting loved ones at a young age. Chery's younger brother, Joshua Chery, a student at Binghamton University, said Esther got her nurturing qualities from their grandmother who moved to the United States to help their single mother.

"She (grandmother) always showed unconditional love, and since that was our environment, she got influenced by her," Joshua said, adding that their mother was also an influence in Esther's life.

Ashley Thenor, Esther's friend since elementary school, has also noticed Esther's motherly tendencies. She describes Esther as a person with a natural care for people, which has always made people gravitate toward her.

"She always gets where you're coming from. She has a lot of empathy and is always there for you," Thenor said. "You can spend years without talking to her, and when you call her and need something, she is right there for you."

Like any good mother or grandmother, Esther is about reinforcing self-acceptance. In the fall of 2012, Esther became one of the founders of K.I.N.K.S, the college organization that promotes natural beauty — specifically natural hair. Though she was loved for her nurturing qualities, Esther was not immune to ridicule.

Growing up in the Haitian culture and in an environment where straightened hair and perms were the norm, she realized the importance of promoting natural hair and erasing its connotation of slavery. The Gabby Douglas hair controversy was one of the many things that triggered the initiation of the organization.

Being a human development and family relations major has been beneficial to Esther in her work with K.I.N.K.S, she said. The skills required from her has helped her with her communication, patience and teamwork skills.

"I think being a helping hand helps me focus on not only what I want for the club to achieve, but also what other people want to see the club achieve," Esther said.

Besides helping students with self-acceptance and lending them a shoulder to cry on when they need it, Esther helps students with their studies. It was during her time as a math tutor for EOP that she got her nickname "Mama Esther."

Though busy tutoring and finishing up her internship at Meadow and Health Care Center, which she gave up a job at Academic Advising for, Esther still finds time to also sing at a Gospel Choir. She said keeping busy is what helps her not only find purpose but also motivates her do more and grow from her experience.

"I think that you reap what you sow," she said.

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