



LEE WEBB

Football

University of Southern California

Public Policy, Management, and Planning

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Lee Webb knew from the age of 12 that he was going to attend USC. Eleven years later, this dream became a reality. The fact that he realized his dream, in and of itself, is not particularly remarkable until you understand the journey that this young man took on the way to making his dream come true. At the time that he made that promise to himself, he was pushing all his worldly belongings in a shopping cart up Figueroa Street near the USC campus.

The night before, he had slept on a bus-stop bench, where he could actually get more sleep than at the skid row homeless shelter where he had tried to sleep several nights earlier. The path hasn't always been easy for Lee Webb, but it has proven to be rewarding; he has helped his team win two national championships and is expecting to compete for a spot on an NFL roster this coming fall.

Lee credits his success to his work ethic, good attitude, and the tremendous support that he felt from so many staff members at USC and his foster family. Lee's story appears to be one of challenges, roadblocks and disappointments, but it is really a story about how important mentors, role models, and opportunity can be to a young child.

His youth was filled with exposure to drug abuse, gang activity, and transient living. Fortunately, he had a surrogate big brother who he claims taught him about responsibility, a foster mother who both nurtured him and pushed him to make the most of himself, and a high school football coach who demanded excellence and accountability. When his football coach realized the kind of talent that Lee had, he took the time to help Lee understand that he had a shot at a college education if only he could turn things around in the classroom. He spent his last two years at Crenshaw High School trying to dig himself out of the academic hole in which he found himself. He studied diligently for the SAT and raised his grade point average to a 3.8, and now, five years later, he has both his college degree and an opportunity to compete in the NFL.

At first, he was hesitant to tell his story, but friends and family convinced him it is an important story to tell. His story gives hope to young people across the United States who find themselves surrounded by poverty, drug abuse, and homelessness. In his essay, he wrote, "I could have easily succumbed to the gang violence and drug use I saw around me every day. But I chose a different path...everyone has that choice to make, and I wanted people (especially children) to understand that." Lee could have easily become just another statistic of failure; instead, he's a statistic of success and a reminder to all of us that every child has potential regardless of the circumstances into which they are born.