



Shahad Alfartosy, 20, Houston (higher education)

There were times of active war periods, where for months we wouldn't even be able to go to school. We would just kind of be at home. And it was just kind of like you hear bombs and that's just kind of a norm. There was no future there, even to this day it's still hard to imagine any type of future, especially for young kids, which is why my parents decided to come here.

My parents always kind of were like, "you're going to college" there was no other way around it. Like, you came all the way here to America, you're going to get the best out of it. But paying for it was a huge issue, especially coming from a family where there are five siblings in the house so we're like "how are we going to pay for all of that?"

Actually it was a field trip from an AVID program when I was in eighth grade. We went to the early college, took a tour and everything. And it seemed too good to be true. Even to my parents. It was like they pay for two years of your college and you just do a dual credit for two years and you're good.

I remember we didn't have stuff like orchestra or band that other schools did. It was just academics, academics, academics. And at times, it was just really, really overwhelming, but it paid off. I was able to graduate two years early, but it was very, very intense and you just kind of had to learn — and that was the difficult part — you had to learn how to adjust and take care of yourself while also maintaining that, which is something I still struggle with honestly. And I saw that with a lot of other students as well, just being able to handle their vigorous activities of the program.

A lot of dual credit teachers that we've had were aware that we were going to university, so some of them were like "I know you think it's going to be easier" but they were even more intense. Because I was a biology major, I remember when I took that first class she made sure we had a strong foundation to be able to survive at university.

Those credits really went far when I went to college, even though it was hard adjusting at first.

I definitely see myself being a doctor, for sure. That's always been a straight path for me since I was very young. And I want to start a project for back home because I went back for the first time last summer for the first time in nine years, I had never been back, and the conditions have gotten much worse over time.