

Living the American Dream
Justin Breen, updated 6/4/18

Shirley Toy is full proof the American Dream is alive and well.

Toy, an only child of parents who emigrated from China, graduated from University of Illinois at Chicago on Mother's Day. Her parents never went to college, but moved to Chicago so their daughter would have a chance at an American education.



“That was their ultimate dream for me,” said Toy, a Bridgeport resident and Kelly High School graduate. “I’ve made my parents proud, and I received the education they never got to have. They came here with absolutely nothing, and they want me to be successful and live the American Dream they never got to.”

Toy credited Bottom Line Chicago for helping her achieve her college dreams.

Founded in Boston 20 years ago, Bottom Line’s Chicago office opened four years ago and the students in the program have a college

persistence rate of over 90 percent. This year the program is serving more than

1,000 students in Chicago, with plans to expand to serve more students in the Fall. Last year there was a wait list of 500 students.

Toy was part of Bottom Line Chicago's first class of college graduates as well.

"I'm honored to be in their first class of successful graduates," Toy said. "They've watched me grow, and I've watched them grow. It's been life changing how they have been helping me and following me for all four years of college."

Toy's Bottom Line advisor, Hannah Lee, said Toy "exemplifies what it means to be a Bottom Line student."

"She has taken the time to utilize our resources, she comes to every meeting engaged and excited to learn, and she has participated in many of our career events, such as a Professional Development Day at Deloitte and our Choosing Your Major workshop," Lee said. "Students often have lots of questions about how to make the most of their college experience and prepare for their career. Shirley is an example of how, if the resources are available, a student can maximize their professional development and leave college with confidence and skills. Shirley has definitely made the most of her time in college and has built a strong network of supporters around her at the same time, and I am proud to have her represent Bottom Line Chicago as one of our first graduates."

Toy graduated from UIC with a degree in English with a focus in Professional Writing. During college, she worked at Dylan's Candy Bar and Pandora Jewelers, interned at SOCIAL Sparkling Wine, and she was Chapter President for Her Campus.

During her senior year, Toy looked for jobs to help her pursue a career in social media, sales, marketing public relations or journalism. She recently accepted an account executive position at Yelp.

Toy discovered Bottom Line while she was a Kelly senior involved with Genesys Works – an organization whose mission is to provide pathways to career success for high school students in underserved communities through skills and training, meaningful work experience and impactful relationships.

Toy said she hopes to serve as a positive example for current and future graduates at Kelly High School, where 96 percent of the 2,144 total students are economically disadvantaged, according to U.S. News and World Report.

“Not a lot of students make it out of my high school,” she said. “I hope I can inspire others to achieve their American Dream and to go far with Bottom Line’s support.”