The family’s journey began some 1,800 miles away. But, once you meet them, it’s not hard to see how it led them here.

Billy spent the first 12 years of his life growing up in the west end of Las Vegas. He describes it as a rough neighborhood, one where he chose to avoid mischief by staying inside. He says his mother told him, “If you’re going to go out, make it worthwhile.” It was as much a warning to stay out of trouble as a call to make a difference.

Billy took those words to heart, spending time as a child helping his grandmother, great-grandmother and others in need both in Las Vegas and, later, while living in Arkansas.

As a young age, people are worse [off] than we are or been through this longer than we had,” he says. “It made me stronger and wiser as a person.”

That ability to find a silver lining is a common thread with the Longs. After several years in Arkansas, the family, which then included Deyvon (born in 1993), moved back to Las Vegas. But, Billy says, his mother had tired of city life. A visit to a friend in Canada convinced her to move her family north. From there they eventually settled in Superior.

While Deyvon and Demarrio enrolled in elementary and middle schools, Billy spent time trying to find his way; working full-time, starting programs at another local college, but never finding the right fit. He began looking closely at WITC-Superior in 2009 after older sister, Kenyadara, 29, earned her nursing degree from the school.

“It almost sounds cliché, but my idol has always been Dr. Martin Luther King,” Billy said. “When I saw that WITC was starting a human services program I thought it was where I should be.”

He enrolled in fall of 2010 and immediately became a presence on campus, joining the Campus Activities Board, the Green Team, the Human Services Associate’s Club and most recently serving as Student Senate President. His fellow students have taken notice.

“Billy has a type of leadership ‘magic’ that enables him to excite, lead and organize groups of people to go beyond what they may have thought possible,” says human services instructor Johanna Garrison.

Demarrio became equally involved soon after enrolling in the spring of 2011. While he already devotes his free time volunteering at local shelters and parks, he dreams of using his degree in human services to build his own non-profit agency dedicated to helping people find the services they need.

“I want to live by example. I feel like I can use the adversity I experienced in my own life as a tool to empower others,” says Demarrio.

But those years were also marked by struggle. Demarrio, 21, says difficult circumstances forced his family into periods of homelessness. He remembers briefly living in a shelter as a young child. Another time, he says, his family lived out of their car.

“Tough times have shaped my future, calling it an important stepping stone,” says Garrison. “No matter which path they choose in life, the common thread with the Longs is that enables him to excite, lead and organize groups of people to go beyond what they may have thought possible,” says human services instructor Johanna Garrison.

Demarrio became equally involved soon after enrolling in the spring of 2011. While he already devotes his free time volunteering at local shelters and parks, he dreams of using his degree in human services to build his own non-profit agency dedicated to helping people find the services they need.

“I want to live by example. I feel like I can use the adversity I experienced in my own life as a tool to empower others,” says Demarrio.

Deyvon was just 17 years old when he entered the Human Services Program at WITC-Superior in the fall of 2011. He credits WITC with helping him shape his future, calling it an important stepping stone.

For the rest of WITC’s students and staff, the Long family bond will never be felt like it is this year. Billy is set to graduate in the spring and Deyvon will take a year off to enlist in the Army National Guard. Demarrio will be in attendance slated to graduate in the spring of 2013. But, however brief, their spirit of involvement and commitment will be felt for years to come.

To learn more about this program, visit witc.edu/pgmpages/humanrsvc

“Each brother has his own personality and strengths,” says Garrison. “No matter which path they choose in human services, they will have the opportunity to be successful and make a difference in the lives of others.”

Real College. Real World. Real You.

witc.edu