



Latoya Smith

Brevard County Adult Education
Cocoa, Florida

Latoya attended Florida public schools until she became a teenage pregnancy statistic at 16 years of age. She had to drop out of high school because of illnesses related to the pregnancy. She enrolled in

an online high school program and graduated with a high school diploma.

Latoya discovered that her high school diploma was not accepted at most of her local colleges. She was advised to go back to school to complete her GED. Before she decided to enroll into a GED program, she managed to complete her CNA certification. Latoya worked as a CNA for years then decided she needed a better career plan to provide for her daughter.

Latoya enrolled at Central Area Adult Education in the fall of 2015. Due to family and financial issues at home, Latoya had to postpone her goal to complete her GED. She re-enrolled in September 2016 determined to reach her educational goals to attend college. She took a temporary leave of absence from her job to finish her GED. From September 2016 until she graduated in February 2017, Latoya worked very hard to earn her high school diploma (GED). Even with her daily struggles such as no transportation, being the sole provider for her daughter and having minimal income, she attended classes regularly.

Latoya has enrolled at Keiser University for summer term 2017. She has to take a few general courses as pre-requisites to the physical therapist assistants program, but she hopes to start the PTA program in January 2018. Her goal is to become the first in her family to graduate with a college degree and provide a better life for her daughter and herself. Latoya is well on her way to achieving her life and educational goals.

“Be yourself and no one will know if you are doing it right or wrong but you.”



Bernice Aponte

Polk County Adult Education
Largo, Florida

Bernice was a police officer in Puerto Rico and due to personal reasons, she decided to immigrate to Ohio with her brothers, mainly to explore better living conditions for raising her daughter. After many years, the entire family moved to Haines City, Florida, and

she accepted a job as a security guard on the night shift. It was a good start, but leaving her teenage daughter alone all night was not what she wanted. Even though she lived for several years in Ohio, she lived in a Hispanic community where all her needs were met. There was no need to learn English – until now. This is when she decided to enroll at East Area Adult School’s ESOL program. When she tested, she was placed in the high intermediate level. Her writing and reading skills were fine, but she definitely needed to increase her vocabulary skills and polish her listening and speaking skills.

Bernice was enrolled in the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program, in the high intermediate level. When Bernice reached the advanced level, she was also enrolled in the Transitions Program, a program unique to our school. When she exited the program, not only was she able to survive in an English language society, but she also increased and improved her language proficiency to an academic level. With these additional courses, Bernice did not have to take any remedial courses in order to reach the expected/desired level in the workforce, and was able to compete with English speaking individuals for job positions, promotions, and salary raises.

In an effort to become a volunteer for the Polk County Sheriff Office, she met the sheriff of Polk County. He was so impressed with her determination, discipline, and personality, that he offered her a position as a corrections officer AND a full sponsorship to enroll in the police academy!

Life rewarded her. She met a wonderful man whom she married and moved to Pinellas County, where she is currently a sergeant in corrections. She wants to move up in the chain of command at Largo’s Sheriff’s Department.

“No one is responsible of your own destiny, except you. Stop whining of what people cannot do for you, because like Carol Burnett says, ‘Only I can change my life. No one can do it for me.’ Where does the power to change my life come from? Simple: Education.”



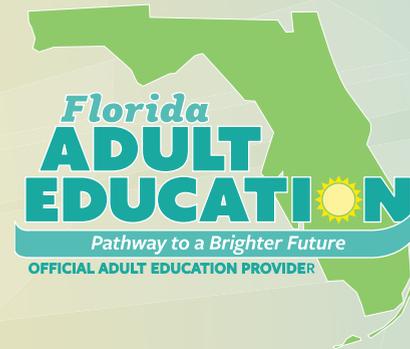
Christina DeSensi

Citrus County School District
GED® Preparation Program
Inverness, Florida

Christina came to the Withlacoochee Technical College’s (WTC) GED® preparation class in April 2014 as a scared, recently divorced 38 year old with four children. Her husband (a doctor) had recently

left her as the sole provider for herself and her children, but she had no job. The home she and the children lived in was in foreclosure. She had trouble finding a job without a high school diploma. Christina quickly proved she is a hard worker and needed to get done fast. With four children and little to no income, she needed help. The local United Way stepped in to assist her with food and to help her get her feet on the ground. Christina earned her GED® credential within nine weeks of enrollment at WTC and was awarded a two year scholarship to the College of Central Florida. Christina is currently enrolled in the Paralegal Studies program at the College of Central Florida where she maintains a 3.5 GPA and is employed part time in the College’s TRIO program as a tutor and mentor in the WTC GED® preparation program.

“If you are willing to work hard, the sky is the limit and anything can be achieved.”



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SUNSHINE SUCCESS STORIES

Showcasing Florida’s Adult Education Students



Adult education and career, technical and workforce education serve over 175,000 students in Florida through a dual delivery system of K-12 public school districts and community/state colleges. Correctional institutions, libraries, community and faith based organizations also serve adult students. The Sunshine Success Stories identifies learners who have reached their life goals as a result of their participation in the adult education system and are now active in their communities.

The purpose of the Sunshine Success Stories is to:

- Showcase the triumphs of students who participated in adult education/workforce education programs;
- Demonstrate the results of integrated academics – adult education to career and technical programs to community/state colleges;
- Increase awareness of adult education and career and technical education statewide; and
- Illustrate the impact of these programs on an individual's and state's economic growth.

On the following pages, you will read success stories from around the state that illustrate how adult education has impacted the lives of so many. For every one story you read, there are dozens more that echo the successes of adult education students in Florida.

Congratulations and thank you to the adult education students featured in this brochure, who shared their stories of hardships, challenges and success. They proudly represent the thousands of adult education students, who are given a second chance to gain self-esteem, a sense of personal and civic responsibility, and obtain higher wages, which translates to a more productive workforce for Florida. These adult education students are truly inspiring.

ACE of Florida would like to thank those individuals who took the time to nominate and share their student success stories. We encourage you to use this publication to help promote your adult education programs and continue sharing your adult education student successes in Florida. ACE of Florida is proud to bring you the following Sunshine Success Stories.



Jyanna Parker

Broward County Adult Education
Ft. Lauderdale, Florida

Jyanna dropped out of high school in June 2015 while in 11th grade. She was unable to successfully complete high school requirements because she had excessive absences, starting in 9th grade. Her lack of

school attendance was due to the fact that she had to care for her nieces and nephews at home, while everyone else in the family went to work to pay the bills. In October 2015, Jyanna was provided with an opportunity to reengage in school through the OSY-WIOA Adult Grant. With the guidance of the OSY facilitators, Jyanna was able to earn her GED in four months.

Working on her GED, watching her nieces and nephews, Jyanna also had the opportunity to complete a 600 hour paid work experience. She completed this work experience with the School Board of Broward County as General Assistant in the Career, Technical, Adult and Community Education Department. She did so well that when it ended she was hired as a General Clerk I with benefits.

She is now working part-time and enrolled full time at Broward College. Her short term goals are to buy a car and move out on her own. She hopes in the future to continue working for the school board, and work her way up to becoming a lawyer for the school board.

“I have learned that there is more for me to do than just get a high school diploma. Now that I have my GED, I want to work hard and become even more successful!”



Tabita Lepindea

Lee County Adult and Career
Education
Fort Myers, Florida

Tabita is a Romanian immigrant who lived a harsh life under Communist rule. Before the Revolution, she and her family experienced extreme rations on food, water and electricity. At

the age of 18, her family moved to the United States – a long-time dream of hers.

She worked as a full-time nanny for 4 years, which allowed her to save money and eventually pursue another dream: attending art school. She attended art school in Chicago. Several years later, Tabita returned to school to earn her high school diploma through the Lee County GED Program. At the time of enrollment, Tabita was battling with many struggles. However, she turned school into a refuge where she could escape and focus on goals. Tabita's determination molded her into a highly successful and motivated woman. To her, the GED program was the foundation for her educational triumph and helped build her confidence through the encouragement of her teachers.

Tabita earned her diploma in only two semesters all while maintaining a job and dealing with life's numerous trials. The faculty unanimously selected her as the student speaker for the graduation ceremony where she delivered an inspiring speech to a crowd of over 1,000 people. Immediately following graduation, she enrolled at Florida Southwestern State College and began her coursework to become a Physician's Assistant. At FSW she maintained a 3.81 GPA and was recognized by several professors as a leader in the classroom. She is currently awaiting acceptance from Miami-Dade College's P.A. program. Her ultimate goal is to open her own clinic as a P.A. Along with being a full-time student and maintaining a job, Tabita dedicates much of her spare time each week volunteering with the local chapter of Habitat for Humanity and the Salvation Army, and her local church.

“You never know how strong you are until being strong is the only choice you have.”



Nancy Perez

Miami-Dade County Public
Schools
ESOL/ABE Programs
Homestead, Florida

Nancy emigrated from Cuba to the United States in the summer of 2012. She had to leave behind her country and profession as a lawyer in search

of a better life. She and her family had to escape the oppressive claws of the communist regime, a government that does not allow freedom, rights, security or stability of life.

Less than three months in the U.S., she was diagnosed with cancer. She was attending South Dade Adult Education Center in Homestead. Even after each treatment she always attended English class. Her teacher was both a teacher and friend to her. She has never forgotten that her teacher was the one who introduced her to the GED class as a way to improve her English.

Thanks to the South Dade educational program, she was able to obtain her College Credit Certificate in Business Office-Human Resources, and obtain her Human Resources position at a local food business. Attending South Dade Technical College provided an opportunity for Nancy to achieve her goals of learning to write and speak English after she arrived in the United States. She persevered through challenges and was able to obtain a job and career that allows her to take care of her family and enjoy the freedoms that she came to this country for. Nancy rarely missed school when undergoing chemotherapy and ultimately beat the disease. She looks forward to continue to grow as a professional and obtain her Associate's degree in the future.

“Persist and never give up!”
