

Student's Speak

Michigan's Region 10

Macomb and Oakland County

February 25th, 2019

Troy, Michigan



Michigan Association
of Community and
Adult Education

Michigan's
Children

*Public policy
in the best interest
of children*



Troy Continuing Education

N I L E S C E N T E R

201 West Square Lake Road • Troy, Michigan 48098
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My name is Elena Khoreshcheva. I am from Russia. I came to the United States three years ago. I met my husband here, and we got married. I found a new life here, my family, a new society and a great opportunity to get an interesting job. If I look back, I see how much my life changed. The rhythm of life, new people, education and possibilities for the future.

My first step was to start to study English and to get my bearings. I found free English classes at Adult Education in Troy Community Education. I met good teachers, new people, and I found out that school has an interesting program to study language, including pronunciation, reading, grammar, conversation and some additional helpful classes. It is a great for everyone who would like to study language. After that, I decided to get a plan for my future job. I have a PhD in my country, and it doesn't directly transfer. I made an education plan to get a masters degree here in the US. I continued my education at Troy Community Education and started my education at Oakland Community College to prepare for future education and a job. In parallel, Troy Community Education presented a new pilot program for immigrants named TRAC (Troy Adult Education and Career). This program offers help for immigrants to prepare for a future job. The program is based on studying language. It also teaches how to build a resume, prepare for an interview, offers special programs, helps me match a job skill and complete an industry certification. In addition, this program helps to find a job. My third step was that I decided to take this class. After completion, I will get a certificate. I hope to get an interesting job in Quality Control! Also, I plan to get a master's degree in the future.

In conclusion, I know that many immigrants started their education in Adult Basic Education. After that, many of them continued their education or found jobs. I hope that people, who listen to my story, will take major steps and will achieve success! The future depends on us.

ROMULUS ADULT EDUCATION

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My name is Tamiaka Gaines. I am 36 years old and a resident of Romulus, Michigan. I'm a mother of 2 children, my son is 16 and daughter is 12. I was born and raised here in the states on the East side of Detroit Mi. I stand here before you holding in my possession my high school diploma as a proud graduate of Romulus Adult Education. Currently, I am attending Wayne County Community college full time where I am studying phlebotomy majoring in nursing. I have never been so proud of myself and have always been inspired to do something great, something amazing that will change the lives of people. My life circumstances altered my plans when my parents divorced and my mother was forced to become a single parent. She worked very hard to support her 4 young children as a single parent without any educational background. Just imagine how few opportunities were provided for her. During this time she struggled with severe depression. I was the second oldest and only girl of 4 children. By the age of 12, we lost our home and became homeless. My mother fell deeper into depression and had to undergo treatment. We were forced to live with family, friends, or whoever would take us in. By the time I was 14 and living with a family friend, I was provided the opportunity to work at a nearby McDonalds to help support my siblings. By the age of 16, I dropped out of high school during my 11th grade year feeling like the weight of the world was on my shoulders. This was too much of a responsibility for a young girl who was not prepared to be forced into an early adulthood. Later my mom returned home, but was living on the streets because there wasn't a home to return to after her treatment. She was on the streets alone. As a child, I watched her go through so much and then to see something incredible happen. I saw the strongest women on earth before my eyes. She would not make her circumstances her lifestyle. I saw my mother take back her life. She got off the streets and rebuilt her life by going

back to school. She attended and received her High school diploma from Hazel Park Adult Education and didn't stop there. She continued on furthering her Education at the National Institute of Technology in Southfield MI, and eventually registered at Wayne County Community College to continue her education in general studies. I was proud of her and attended all of her ceremonies. My mother was like a star to me. At that point I knew I wanted to make a change for myself, but it wasn't that easy. I had my first child at age 19 and four years later my daughter was born. I would often sign up at adult educational programs but would never complete them due to circumstances of parenting and work. Falling on hard times and feeling as thou I was becoming a product of my circumstances, I grew tired and hungry for change and for success. I remembered my mother's struggles and watching her win the battle of life's barricades, I knew there was a way out. It come by changing the way I think and ignoring what was presented visually in front of me. It had to be pursued by Faith and willingness. So, I went for it. I only had one choice, and that was to change my life for my children which had become my reason to seek a better life and future. I went back to school. I walked in the doors of Romulus Adult Education and was so inspired. I was greeted by thee most joyful person that assisted me with signing up right away. She encouraged me and ensured me that she would stand beside me until the day of graduation and she did as she promised, but it didn't stop there. The whole staff of this institution encouraged me day and night. The instructors were persistent and if you missed a day they would check on you. If you had a bad day they would make you smile. If you were trying to give up they pushed you. If you didn't know the answer they helped you to use your brain. I was in awe. I had never experienced what I was feeling here anywhere else. In the beginning I was told I would have a little over a year to finish but I did it in 8 months. They were like family, they are family. The Adult education program has opened doors and new opportunities for me. It gave me a second chance at life with no judgement. It gave my mother a second chance and many others like us who didn't make excuses of our circumstances but challenged

them. There should be continued funding for adult education because others should have the option to make a difference in their lives too. They should be offered an opportunity. Mistakes are made in life, tragedy happens, life happens but sometimes all we need is another chance, and if another chance is not an option then we fail and to me failure was not an option. I am now a college student. Happy that I have a chance ahead of me to become whatever I want to be. What more could I hope for. My family is proud and I am an example to my children the way my mother was an example to me and hopefully my grandchildren in the future. That is what Romulus Adult Education did for me. Thank you for taking the time out to listen to my story.

Adult Education

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Ben Dowker, Director of Adult & Alternative Programs

My name is Jill Cameron. I live in White Lake and I have a husband and 5 children. I was born with fetal alcohol syndrome and as a result, I struggled through with learning disabilities all of my life.

I was not able to complete high school because I was not able to take my final exams due to being pregnant at the time.

In 2012, a few years after my first son was born, I enrolled in an adult education program to finish earning my high school diploma.

After one year, this program closed before I was able to earn enough credits to graduate. I found a new adult education program in Rochester called RACE. I was there for two years before we moved to White Lake, and it was too far to drive.

Since then, Huron Valley Adult Ed moved to a location close to my house. Since we only have one car, I walk to school every day. In December, I finally earned my high school diploma! I am so excited.

Now I feel more confident helping my kids with their homework.

In May, I am going to start the Certified Nurse's Aide program at Huron Valley Adult Ed. When I graduate from the CNA program, I will have a job waiting for me in a local long term care facility.

It is my goal to earn the money to buy a second car so I won't have to depend on my husband or sister-in-law driving me to work every day.

I want people to know that all of this would not be possible without a high school diploma. Adult education programs give people like me that opportunity.

When I walk across the stage in my cap and gown this June, I will not only be proud of myself but I'll be able to look out into the audience and see the faces of my husband and five kids and know that they are proud of me too. Adult education made all of this possible.

Eventually I plan to go to college because I want to work in the medical field in pediatrics. Earning my diploma is not the end for me, it's just the beginning.

RACE
Rochester Alternative & Adult
Center for Education

Chris Solano, M.Ed.
Supervisor/Principal



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PRIDE IN EXCELLENCE

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Marius Achim, M.A.
RACE Counselor

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Hello Everyone! My name is Margaret and I am a current student at Rochester Adult and Community Education. Outside of school I am a veterans' daughter, wife, mother, and grandmother of six. I came to the United States when I was 9 years old and was going to school in Anchor Bay School District. I loved everything about school back then but things changed. My dad retired and we had to move out of government housing. This was a place that I was very comfortable and did not like the change that was happening. We moved to New Haven School District and I felt that I did not fit in. I chose to hang around the wrong people and made some very bad choices. In 1991, during my junior year of high school, I dropped out. I made that choice because I felt that my grades were too bad and I was too far behind, that it would be easier. Well let me just say that it was not. I became a statistic, an 18 year old pregnant woman with no high school diploma, no job and no real means to support a child.

I struggled for many years with going back to school and was enrolled in 2 different programs. Both of those have since closed. Richmond Community Schools Adult Education and Romeo Adult Education. Being a single mother was not easy and I had to make some very hard choices when it came to my kids. Choices that I felt could have been different if I had half of the motivation and resources that I do now. I struggled with finding my purpose in life, one that I felt was more than just a name. I needed an identity. I was tired of always hearing that I did not graduate. So I made one more choice.

I chose Rochester Adult and Community Education. I want others to know that their life does not have to stop because they did not graduate. There are programs available to us that a lot of people do not know about. Programs that help you get your high school diploma, your GED, scholarships to help with the cost of college and many resources that people do not know are available. Rochester Adult and Community Education gave me my identity. They helped me find one of my purposes in life. Through the Adult Education program I am graduating with my High School Diploma in a few short months, something that a few years ago I didn't see possible. With the help of this program and others like it, and many countless hours of hard work, the dream that I once had is finally coming true. Now this has opened many doors for me, my future and for others that struggle too. I hope the adult education programs that are available can get the proper funding to keep them running, much needed resources, and the accessibility that these programs deserve so that others like me can find the help that they need.

Thank you for your time!

"RACE to the Top!" College Ready, Career Ready, Life Ready



Novi Community School District

Career Preparation High School & Adult Education

<http://www.novi.k12.mi.us/ms/>

25345 Taft Road, Novi, Michigan 48374 (248) 449-1717 • Fax (248) 449-1719

Good Evening, My name is Payton Dillivan and I would like to share my story with you.

Two, visually impaired parents raised me; my stepdad was very verbally and physically abusive. He prevented me from ever leaving the house by “Homeschooling” me. I was held back from an education. He wanted me to stay at home for the rest of my life to benefit his needs. I always felt trapped, as I could not do anything without it “being a big deal.”

I finally moved out when I was eighteen. I started working three jobs, from sun up to sun down. That was my life for a few years.

Things started to change when I was twenty. I met someone and we moved to the eastside of the state. His family was all about education, they were very well off. I saw what they had accomplished and understood all the steps they had to take in order to be successful. It inspired and motivated me. I researched ways to further my education. I came across Novi Adult Education and started taking classes. I have been working very hard to better my life. I want a house someday and a job I feel proud about. If it were not for adult education, I would not be able to better myself of my life.

I did an internship last year January at the hospital. Working at the surgical desk. I loved it so much. I am currently working on passing my last test, which is math to obtain my GED. Once I pass this final test, I have a position waiting for me at Providence Hospital in Novi. Thank you.

Developing Each Student's Potential with a World-Class Education

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Troy Continuing Education

N I L E S C E N T E R

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Hello, everyone. My name is Heekyung Kimm. I'm from South Korea and I've been in the US since April 2016. I have two lovely sons. We wanted a better life for our family. I got a chance to come to the US through a job at a chicken factory in Montgomery, Alabama. I didn't have to think twice, even if it would be hard for me. I remember hot and wet air and hanging chickens. I worked for 8 hours a day, 5 days a week on night shift. I stood in front of the conveyor belt and took out the insides of a chicken and cut the parts of a chicken every 2 seconds. I could not change my job position, and I had to endure even if I was treated unfairly.

Because I could not speak English. I tried to find free ESL classes, but there were no ESL classes except expensive college courses and I didn't have enough money.

One year later, my husband got a job in Michigan and we could move here in July 2017. I was looking for free ESL classes. I had registered in free ESL and studied English hard, and now I'm going to take a program for job. People say that opportunity is easy and everywhere. However, immigrants like us feel lost about where and how to start. It is this adult education program that gives us new opportunities. Through this program, we make friends, exchange information, encourage each other, and go forward.

I want to be proof to those who are hesitant to participate in this society because of limited English, or being a foreigner or any other reason. I never thought I would be here. But my family and I have a chance at a bright future through an adult education program.

There are thousands like me who need adult education programs. Thank you for your time.



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I am Natasha Remson from Southfield, MI, and I have returned to Adult Education to earn my diploma. Going back to school is important to show my children that giving up is not an option. They need to keep going after their dreams, and going to school is the first step.

Growing up wasn't always easy for me. As a child, I was molested at a young age. Going to school was difficult because I had a hard time understanding what I was reading. I couldn't understand the concepts. High school was the worst because people tried to bully me, but they couldn't bully me any worse than my mom already did. High school work was hard for me and my mom didn't help me, but she made sure my little sister received all the help she needed to complete high school while I was left in the dark. I failed all my classes and then the school gave me alternative classes, but even then the teachers didn't really help me at all.

At the age of 17, I became pregnant with my daughter and my mom was really hard on me saying that I was too dumb to be a mother and I wouldn't be able to teach my child anything or help my child with homework. Instead of proving her wrong, I gave into her insults and mental abuse and dropped out of school.

I've tried going back to school several times and I still couldn't grasp the concepts, so I stopped going and moved to New York with my daughter to get a fresh start. There, I met a man and had three more kids. I could not understand why my face couldn't stay up from off the floor and why I always had tears in my eyes and couldn't catch my breath. I almost lost my son to him, but thank God I didn't.

I fled for my life and moved back to Michigan. Once back here, I helped out some family members. But when it came time to pay the bills, everyone left us homeless in the cold. We were homeless for about 2 years; sleeping in and out of cars and in and out of warming centers. Finally, I found a shelter that would house our whole family. I tried to carry on like nothing was happening; I went to work and the kids went to school like everything was okay. The kids thought we were on an adventure. I never let them know the worries I had.

On a daily basis, it is hard for me to help my children out with their homework. Yes, sometimes I have to ask Google for help. Their homework is not how mine was when I grew up. Through my Adult Education classes, I am more equipped to help them with their homework.

I put my dreams on hold because I don't have a high school diploma yet. I want to go to cosmetology school to get my cosmetology license. I enjoy doing hair and I've always wanted to own my own business since I was a little girl.

Just like my colleagues who are Adult Education students, I want a job that not only pays the bills, puts food on the table, puts clothes on our backs and shoes on our feet; I want something left over to travel or just do things families like to do. I would love to still have money left over for a rainy day. That's the life I want to have for my family. I also want to help out the homeless with family. I would love to become a foster parent and bring joy to someone's life.

The moral of the story is that I want to teach my kids and people like me to never give up on their dreams. It doesn't matter what you go through or how hard you have it, no matter how long it takes, I don't want them to give up. That's why I am an Adult Education student. It will open doors for me that are currently closed.



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My name is Souad Sarakbi, I was born and raised in Damascus, Syria. I received my bachelor's degree in law from Damascus University. During my successful and active career as a civil rights lawyer in my native home of Syria. The war escalated, my family and I had to flee the country. In 2016 My family and I have successfully relocated to the State of Michigan.

As a result of my status as a refugee, I faced many barriers during this long journey, such as income ,communicating with other, using my degree.

Actually this is what all immigrants are usually exposed to when they leave their country. My experience as a refugee prompted me to learn English and find job to overcome my struggle in finding a new home that support me with a decent and stable life. Fortunately I had chance to meet the teacher Katie Thompson (ESL teacher), she encouraged me to register in Adult Education, and TRAC program to improve my English skills, and find job. Currently. My dream is to continue my life's work of protecting people's human rights and making a positive impact for my family and my new country, and to become productive and active citizen in my local community. My story represents all immigrants, when they find themselves faced with new language and new culture that increase their psychological stress of instability and fear of the future, and they lessen these difficulties, when they learn the language of the host country. I hope supporting Adult Schools from all aspects, that supports a new Americans to improve their life, and achieve their goals.

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Chris Solano, M.Ed.
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Marius Achim, M.A.
RACE Counselor

**Christina
Schlenker, M.A.**
RACE Counselor

Good afternoon everyone. My name is Daniela Padilla Mauricio. I'm from Mexico and I have been here only six months. In Mexico there are a lot of injustices and violence against workers, elderly and especially women. Also, there are many problems in the education reforms. Therefore, the possibilities of studying and working are more difficult for all the young students, especially women, that everyday are fighting for their rights and for their lives. My family and I arrived in the United States with the intention of being able to continue working and studying without having the fear of being discriminated against.

Thanks to the RACE school, I have the opportunity to continue my studies and be prepared to get enrolled with a good Community College or University to study, when I finish my studies in June. And then, get a job to be part of this community and make it grow. I recognized that RACE helped me a lot to improve my English and feel comfortable communicating. In addition, I feel safe and in confidence with all the teachers who are attentive and passionate in teaching.

It would be good if this school is always available to all people who want to improve their education as immigrants like me, because without RACE we would not have a guide, the tools and the education needed to be part of this country. This school helped me to find a place here in America, so I'm grateful for this school and this nation for the opportunity of live without fear of violence and discrimination. Thank you so much.



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Hi! My name is Lake Hardigan and I am so grateful for the opportunities Novi Community Schools has given me in education, mentor ship, and in allowing me to present my story.

I'm bipolar. I always have been, but it went undiagnosed for years. I dropped out of high school twice due to suicide attempts. These were not my first times attempting, but they were the ones that made people realize that I needed more intensive mental health services. I was drowning in my depression and I was told many times by mental health professionals that I would never be able to finish school.

When we moved back to the States, my parents hoped that maybe in the U.S. I would be able to finish high school. My mom searched and found Novi Adult Education. Even though I felt hopeless and scared of starting school again, thinking of all the ways I could self-sabotage, I signed up for classes. I remember feeling ashamed as Linda went through my transcript and grades - I did not have any faith that this would work. My mental health was pulling me down and it showed. In the beginning, school was hard, I would leave class and bother Diane or Linda, but the staff was always willing to help motivate me. As time went on, I learned how to cope in class. The teachers would let me pull out my play-doh or coloring books and I would manage to keep on top of my classes. I began to nourish my positive attitude back to life.

For the first time I can remember, I began to feel confident in school and I quickly set the goal of graduating, something I never thought would be possible. I no longer allow my mental health

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to define or hold me back. Novi Career Prep helped me realize how resilient I am. I now have a bright and prosperous future and the tools I need to reach my goals.

If you told me four years ago that I would have finished high school and be in my fourth semester of college by now, I would have told you were crazy. Novi Adult Education helped motivate me and now, instead of being the two-time-high-school- dropout, I am a college student. I received two four-points last semester and am working on my Associate of Arts, hoping to get a Bachelors and Masters in Social Work and to eventually achieve my dream of getting a Ph.D. I am so much further along than anyone expected me to be and I am so proud of that. I no longer feel ashamed, I do not think about self-sabotaging anymore, and I'm happy. I feel great knowing that I can succeed despite those saying I could not. However, I would not have done it without this program and its staff.

My high school career has been me trying to cross a river. The weight of the waves kept hitting and knocking me down and I spent too much time in the rapids. But Novi Career Prep taught me, not just to stay afloat, but how to swim by teaching me the self-confidence I never had and giving me the tools I needed to succeed. I have been drowning in this river for a long time, but with Novi Schools, I can swim across to a shore I never saw before

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Good Evening everybody. My name is Mary Jane Ballard. This story shares how I came to learn about adult education program. I grew up on the west side of Detroit. My Grandmother raised my brothers and I until I was about 13 years old. Then my mother came back into our life. We were then moved to Royal Oak where my mother remarried and where my life began a new chapter, so I thought. I started Kimball High School in the fall of 1984, although it was a struggle, I managed to get through the first semester. My mother decided that she wanted to do her own thing, so we were moved to our father's house in Hamtramck where I started the second semester. Pushing through freshman year was a struggle but I completed. That summer my father decided to send my brothers and I back to our mother's. Instead, we were rerouted to our Grandmother's for the summer, where I met my future husband. As my sophomore year started at Kimball High School, my mother decided she wanted to travel with kids in tow. Well that was not what I wanted to do, so I left home at the age of 15 to live with my boyfriend. At that point, I tried to enroll in school but could not because you need a parent/guardian. Therefore, I dropped out.

As time went on and I had children of my own, I watched them grow into amazing people. I thought to myself "I need to do better things with my life." Therefore, I began to work as a teacher helper, or any other jobs that allowed me to be in a school setting. I had always thought in the back of my mind that I would go back to school and get my high school diploma

(once my children grew up). Then the unthinkable happened, I divorced. When that happened, I had no desire to start the process of getting my diploma. I figured I had a job so why should I? As time continued I found myself basically at a dead-end job because I have nothing but a 9th grade education, so I needed to start thinking about going to get my GED. At least then I could probably find a little better job. Even though I took a GED class in the fall of 2015, I never went to take the test. Supporting a family was just more important than a GED, so I just put it off. Then one day everything changed when my son came to me and told me he had decided he wants to drop out because he hates school. He kept telling me "Well, you dropped out and you are just fine." That really got me to thinking: Am I just fine? No, I was not! So I thought "Forget the GED, I want my diploma." I would show my son that I could do it, even if I work 3 jobs and have to go to school, I can and will do this for me and my family. This is why I decided to study in Adult Education classes. My plans and goals are to take some college courses in management.

I am grateful for the opportunity that Churchill Community Center Adult Education has given me. I hope my story will benefit other adults who think, there is no way they can get their GED or High school Diploma. You have to have the will power and the ambition to make your dreams become reality.



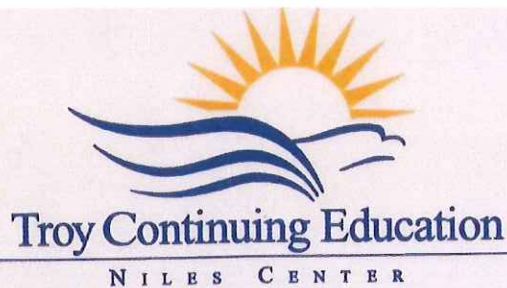
Good evening everyone,

My name is Evan Stinson and I'm from Flushing MI. I am here because I've had some challenges in my life. I remember when I was in high school, my ADHD made it hard for me to sit still and concentrate. Another challenge in my life has been the fact that I lacked a lot of self-discipline in my life, school being one of those.

What the Rochester Adult Center for Education has done for me in the past seven months is it has helped me gain a sense of confidence in the fact that I'm given a second chance in getting my diploma and pushing me outside my comfort zone, as a result I plan to pursue college this fall.

I know my story resonates with everyone who has kids/family responsibilities, full time jobs, and having busy schedules all together but if you have the right mindset and self-discipline you can make anything happen like I have.

In conclusion, I hope you take what I have to say into consideration and I hope this encourages you yourself and others like us to take that second step, that second chance to success. Thank you for your time!



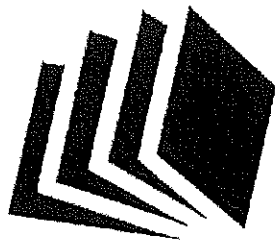
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Hello everyone, Good Morning! I am Bhavisha Modi. I am a civil engineer and I am from India. I came to US along with my husband in 2006 to his better career. Back home, I had my teaching career which I had to give up for this decision.

During our stay here, I became a mother of two beautiful children and with them my world felt almost complete. As my children are grew, my need for better English communication with my children, in school and other activities started haunting me. Making new friends especially in other communities was very difficult. After a few years, when my youngest child was old enough, I started looking for job opportunities. My lack of English skills held me back. While talking with recruiters, different accent and poor grammar made it impossible to land any job.

I was in search for English education online or in surrounding community. I joined a conversation and reading group at our local library. From there I came to know about the Oakland Community College and Troy Adult Education English classes. I was very excited and started both. The Adult Education English program helped me with reading and writing skills and group conversation. These skills also helped me in my CAD based certification programs. Through this program only, I came to know about TRAC and Scholarship programs. Overall, all these activities are helping me to prepare myself to improve my English communication and to start a decent career in the US. Right now, I am working very hard and day by day I feel more and more confident about myself.

I am proud to be part of the Adult education program. Without it, I might still be struggling. With the help of mentors and these education program, I am sure to find good career and self-respect. This story can be story of any stay at home mom, who wants to start career for their family's better future and fulfillment of their dreams.



ROMULUS ADULT EDUCATION

A New Chapter, A New Future

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Hello everyone, my name is Terri Mitchell and I'm very excited to stand before you today to share my story and what I experienced growing up as a young adult. I was raised in the City of Inkster; where I attended Inkster Public Schools. High School was a challenge for me, especially in my senior year, that's where I experienced the most degrading comment from a teacher, I was labeled a "slow learner" whenever I would ask questions or needed help with an assignment he would literally brush me off, and tell me to figure it out the best way I can, or if he saw me approaching him to ask a question, he would throw his hand up as to say go back to your seat, and that he couldn't hold up the rest of the class to help me. I believe that was the start of a deep depression for me. Being a 17 year old pregnant teenager wanting nothing less than to finish school. It was unfortunate that I had to drop out of school in my senior year because I was so ill and was considered "high risk" pregnancy. Not graduating brought a lot of conflict between my parents, and I struggled with the embarrassment of not graduating and disappointing them. My confidence level had reached a very low point, but my babies gave me joy and hope that one day I could return back to school and get my G.E.D. In 2016 my husband and I divorced which put me into a deeper depression, I felt like I just couldn't get anything right. I held close all the failures in my life. In early 2018 a good friend of mine encouraged me to pursue one of my many passions of sewing and enroll at Zaman International Boost Sewing Program under the direction of GiGi Salka. After a few months of being in the Boost Program I approached Ms. Salka about a program that could possibly help me attain my G.E.D. Mrs. Salka immediately made a phone call to Ms. Renae Gowen who is the Program Coordinator for Romulus High School Adult Education Program. After meeting with Ms. Gowen, and now attending both classes, I felt like I was on my way to something bigger than I could have ever imagined. Being able to take sewing classes and receive my G.E.D. I thought WOW!! It can't get any better and indeed it got better. After speaking with Renae she thought it could possibly be better if I would try to get my diploma instead which excited me even more, not only could I get my diploma, but I get to walk across the "stage". I feel so honored and grateful to have these two phenomenal women to choose me of what I consider to be the most exciting and once in a lifetime opportunity to represent MACAE. We need programs like this to put people such as myself back into the work force, to be productive and to boost the employment rate. MACAE has given me a second chance to shape my career path and it gives me hope and others like me in similar situations a sense of accomplishment and to know all is not lost. And we can begin again while building our confidence, to achieve goals that



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Good evening Ladies and gentlemen.

My name is Mark Abo Shabin. I would like to start by thanking God and his blessings upon me. My family for their support especially my father. To all the families of graduates here tonight, I want to say thank you: you are the reason we can graduate today.

I would also like to thank Linda Bob and the administration for their encouragement and commitment to me , and the students. Without their support, I would not be where I am at today. As some of you know, I did not always make the best choices. I had many struggles and obstacles throughout my life. However, I had a dream and a goal. And I was determined that I will reach that goal. See, many of us give up when it gets hard, many of us quit when we experience a little pain. Let me tell you something I learned, pain is temporary. It may last a minute, or an hour, or a day, or a year, but eventually it will subside and something else will take its place. If you quit, however, it will last forever. Therefore, you have to believe that you can do this.

Let me share a story with you, when I was a kid in second grade my Siblings and I went overseas with my mother to Syria. I did not speak the language; I did not know the culture. The public schools did not have a second language assistant. The school administration was brutal with students. We were hit for pointless things. I missed third, fourth, 5th and 8th grade. I was told in my face and behind my back how unsuccessful I was and that I was not smart enough.

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Sometimes I asked myself if it was worth going **to school** after my dream. I doubted myself many of times. Every single time I failed in a subject I always remembered what I went through. I went back to the states as a freshman **in high school who** did not even go through 8th grade. I took a test to see where I was at, and was put in 9th grade in ESL. I was surprised and afraid that I would fail. However, you know what ladies and gentlemen? I passed. I went through sophomore year and passed. I was happy with my success until I came to **the second** half of junior year when I had to go to

Germany to be with my mother for a year. I missed a whole year and a half of school. I was even more depressed that my friends will be graduating and I would not be with them for graduation. For a month I did not talk to anybody, I was in a deep depression remembering what I had gone through and what I was in. However, I got up and started to think about helping my mother in her job helping refugees coming to Germany, guiding and supporting the refugee camps there.

I even had an opportunity to take place in sharing ideas **on the crisis** to major European leaders as an American. I was more positive about what I had accomplished. That pushed me to go back and reach for my dream. When I came back I was looking for GED Classes, but that was not what I wanted. Finally, I found this program. Here, I had the opportunity to get a high school diploma.

It is truly a great privilege to have a program like this in the community. Serving students who are seeking for a high school diploma in difficult circumstances. I cannot be more thankful, and now here I am standing with my diploma in my hand.

Do not give up on your dreams.

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You still have time. Tragedy and trials come to everybody, only you decide how you come out of it. We all are running from obstacles when in fact, it is the obstacle that is going to take you to the next level.

The difference between a champion and someone who will be forgotten, is that a champion shows up, that is the only thing, everyday shows up. And for all of you out there, Let me make this clear, Someone's opinion of you does not have to become your reality. Even though you face disappointments you have to know within yourself that, I can do this even if no one sees it, for me I must see it for myself. Do not give up, do not give in, push through it. If I can do this than you can do this- and today everyone here has done it. Congratulations, to everyone graduating and thank you again to everyone who made this possible.

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