

"FLORIDA'S ADULT EDUCATION SYSTEM... OPPORTUNITIES START HERE"

"Doing Our Part to Ensure Florida is #1 in Workforce Development by 2030"



The Florida Department of Education's Adult Education programs serve over 80,000 students across the state through adult schools, technical and state colleges, correctional institutions, libraries, and community and faith-based organizations.

Florida's adult education system includes a range of instructional programs that help adults get the basic academic skills they need to enter the workforce, a state college, or a technical college, and contribute to Florida's economic development. The major program areas include GED® preparation and testing, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), basic academic skills instruction in reading, writing, math and English language competency, and Integrated Education and Training (IET) programs.

The purpose of the Adult Education Success Stories is to:

- Showcase the triumphs of students who participated in adult 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.

In this issue, 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 hundreds more that echo the successes of adult education students in Florida.



Adult Education/GED® Leads to Bachelor of Nursing and Master's Pursuit

Tabita Lepindea

Lee County Adult and Career Education – Fort Myers, Florida

Tabita Lepindea is a Romanian immigrant who lived a harsh life under Communist rule. While living there, she and her family experienced extreme food, water, and electricity rations. Then, at the age of eighteen, her family moved to the land of opportunity, the United States, and

many new doors started to open for them.

She worked as a full-time nanny and an artist for several years. Despite many personal challenges, she finally decided to return to school to earn her high school diploma through the Lee County Adult Education GED® Program. To her, the Lee County Adult Education GED® program was the foundation for her future in the United States. Tabita earned her diploma while maintaining a job. 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 (FSW) and began her coursework to become a nurse practitioner (NP). At FSW, she maintained a 3.81 GPA and was recognized by several professors as a leader in the classroom.

She enrolled in the NOVA Southeastern University – Fort Myers Nursing Program and graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Nursing in December 2019. After over a year of experience as an emergency room nurse in Fort Myers, she spread her wings and now works as an emergency room travel nurse. She significantly impacts the areas affected by the COVID pandemic. Despite her demanding and challenging job, she started a master's program to become a nurse practitioner last fall, and she is a full-time student while maintaining her career.

Her ultimate goal is to open her own clinic as a Family Nurse Practitioner to provide patient-centered care to the evolving needs of society. In addition, she hopes that she will continue to be an inspiration to others to follow their dreams.

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

TABITA LEPINDEA





GED® – A.S Degree – Industry Credentials – Food Service Manager

Cecilia Perry (CeCe)

Adult Learning Center Osceola (ALCO), Kissimmee, Florida

As many adult education students do, Cecilia Perry (CeCe) first came to the Adult Learning Center Osceola (ALCO) as an unsure individual who had not experienced much success in school over her lifetime. She had already overcome the most challenging part of walking through the doors. The ALCO staff reassured her that she

was not alone and that she would be supported throughout her journey to obtain her dream. This came with sighs of relief and CeCe saying “thank you, Jesus.”

Few students have had the commitment, kindness, patience, respect, and determination that CeCe displays. As a student, she demonstrated a fierce tenacity to overcome the obstacles and struggles that came her way, and although she stumbled, she never gave up. CeCe spent extra time mentoring other students and being the encouraging force that pushed many in the class to keep going and reach their goals. While at ALCO, she maintained a full-time job and worked with her husband Terry in his shell construction business while taking care of her mom, Elena, and son, Terry Jr.

Needless to say, for CeCe, quadratic equations would not be the only obstacle for her while attending ALCO or Valencia College where she would continue her education and training. While attending ALCO, she had many trials and tribulations – one very gut-wrenching period – that included two miscarriages, the tragic death of her husband’s business partner, and nursing her mom back from a near-death experience. Again, like many adults who experience life’s curveballs, this caused CeCe to take a short break from her educational journey and goals – she was devastated. However, she was able to return to ALCO and complete her high school diploma through the GED®.

As she continued at Valencia College, she experienced periods of self-doubt, insecurities, and education during a pandemic! Of course, true to CeCe’s character, she pushed forward and kept going. CeCe often explains what ALCO and what adult education has done for her. Without our program and having the opportunity to earn her high school diploma, her next steps would not have been possible.

In December 2021, she graduated from Valencia College with an A.S. in Culinary Management, being awarded two additional culinary certifications, and being listed on the Dean’s lists. She continues to return to ALCO and speak to our current students about her journey. She is currently managing a fast-food restaurant and is looking to open her own clean eatery that caters to individuals interested in a low-carb lifestyle, which is inspired by her son and mom that live with diabetes.

“It indeed has opened the door for my continued success.”

CECILIA PERRY

Career Dream To Reality...Adult Education Made it Possible!

Mitchell Taylor – Panhandle Technical College, Chipley, Florida

Mitchell Taylor is 32 years old with a wife and three beautiful daughters. He dropped out of high school to go to work farming and start raising his family. He also served as a volunteer firefighter for a small community in our hometown. His dream was always to become a full-time firefighter, but he realized to achieve his dream he needed to return to school and get his diploma to be able to finish his training and apply for a firefighter job.

Mitchell continued farming, working as a farming helper, while attending Adult Ed at the Florida Panhandle Technical College. He would leave school and work until dark plowing and planting fields to help care for his family. As the pandemic got worse and we were forced to temporarily move to distance learning, Mitchell continued to work late at night on-line after work and even attended our Zoom class sessions. In a testament

to his tenacity and commitment, he actually attended a Zoom class meeting on his phone while plowing a field as the tractor was guided by programmed GPS. As if that was not remarkable enough, he was scheduled to test on a workday. In order to make everything work, on his way to a nearby field he called to get permission to park his John Deere tractor in the school parking lot. Permission granted, test passed, field plowed!

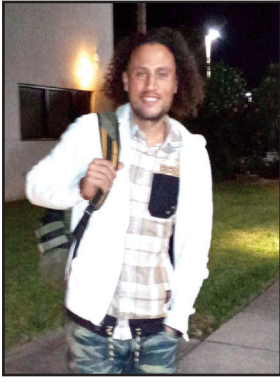
The challenges and obstacles Mitchell faced would have discouraged most other people, but he persevered and graduated with his diploma. The next day, they called him to fire school at Gulf Coast College. He finished his firefighter training and was just hired by Bay County as a fireman.



“I credit my adult education teachers and my family in supporting me in achieving my dreams.”

MITCHELL TAYLOR

As a testament to Mitchell’s tenacity, in addition to working as a firefighter with Bay County, Mitchell has been attending EMT school at Florida Panhandle Technical College. He will finish in the spring semester of 2022.



Adult Education...The Pathway to College and Beyond!

Angel Torrens

Pinellas County Schools Adult Education Program, Pinellas County, Florida

Angel Torrens is a 39-year-old first generation born in the United States Puerto Rican male. Originally from New York, Angel had been in and out of school since third grade and dropped out altogether when he turned twelve. He wound up homeless and in and out of jail in Brooklyn. Looking for a change in his life, he moved to Florida in 2009 where he met his future wife and her three children. She understood the value of an education and he realized a need to be a role model for her children.

As many adult education students are, Angel was embarrassed about his struggles with education and his former life in New York, which he had kept secret from most people, and was reluctant to attend classes. He began self-teaching through YouTube. Sometimes life has a way of lending people a hand when they most need it. While Angel was working as a valet, parking cars, one of the adult education teachers in Pinellas County patronizing the establishment at which he worked, struck up a conversation with him, told Angel about the adult education opportunities in Pinellas and reassured him that there were many others with stories just like his. Angel has shared he did not even know his multiplication tables at the time.

Angel enrolled in the ABE/GED® classes at Tomlinson Adult Learning Center where, as a motivated learner, he progressed quickly through the classes. Angel attained his GED® in October 2020.

With new-found confidence in his ability to succeed, Angel enrolled at St. Petersburg State College. Angel is a Biotechnology major with a 3.96 GPA. His ultimate goal is to follow a path in that field that will lead him to a career in CRISPR (gene engineering and therapy) with an eye toward one day working on a genetic modification project to eradicate sickle cell anemia.

Angel praises adult education and his adult education teachers and credits adult education with providing him with the foundation and skills necessary to be successful in his postsecondary endeavors.

“Adult education and adult education teachers provided me with the foundation and skills necessary to be successful in college.”

ANGEL TORRENS

Broward County Schools Adult Education Program and CareerSource Broward Partnership Pave Road to State College

Cassandra Kancel – Piper High Community School, Sunrise, Florida

Cassandra has had many obstacles placed in her way early in life. She is visually impaired, suffers with anxiety, grew up in the foster care system, and, until recently, did not have a dedicated support system in place to help reduce or lessen any burden she carried. She had the opposite of a strong supportive advocate in her life. Instead of a cheerleader in her corner, she was unfortunately always told she could not accomplish much, she would never finish school, and she would not be able to get a job or have a career.



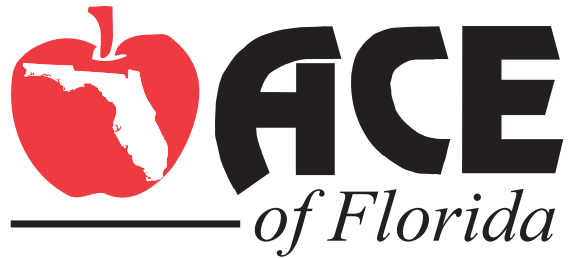
“Do not sell yourself short or underestimate how much people who are unfamiliar with you are willing to help you.”

CASSANDRA KANCEL

Cassandra knew at an early age she wanted to help others. Her initial life goal was to become a dental assistant. Even with a clear goal in mind, without any guidance or help along the way and with so many obstacles to overcome, she dropped out of high school. By this point she did not know what she was going to do much less how she might eventually achieve anything. Fortunately, she connected with staff at the Piper High Community School in Broward County. Cassandra was referred to the Out of School Youth grant funded program in partnership with the Broward County School Board and CareerSource Broward.

The partnership between the school district and local workforce board provided the resources and support that enabled Cassandra to overcome obstacles that, prior to the district’s and workforce board’s support, seemed unconquerable.

With people and agencies now supporting her, Cassandra earned her GED® and headed to Broward State College to begin working toward her goal in becoming a dental assistant. Once at Broward State College, having reflected on her life’s experiences and her long-term desire to help others, Cassandra is now seeking a degree in Social Work so that she can pay her success forward to others with insurmountable challenges.



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