

Mom, 20, earns diploma through adult literacy program, sets sights on BC3

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Andria Boggs is among nearly two dozen students to earn a high school equivalency diploma through adult literacy programs held in Butler, Lawrence and Mercer counties during a Butler County Community College fiscal year that recently ended. Boggs is shown Wednesday, June 23, 2021, with her daughter, Phoenix, near their home in Nectarine, Venango County. Boggs earned a high school equivalency diploma through the Grove City Education Center for Adults, with whom BC3 partners, and plans to enroll at BC3 in the spring.

(Grove City, PA) A Mercer County adult literacy program helped Andria Boggs, who has dyslexia, to earn a high school equivalency diploma at age 20 and seven years after she received a presidential citation for making “straight A’s” in eighth grade.

Butler County Community College partners with the Grove City Education Center for Adults.

That’s where Boggs found herself in March 2020, seeking a diploma long after receiving that commendation from then-President Obama – the highlight of a middle school-year-ending assembly announced as the final presentation and a surprise to her.

“It,” Boggs said, “was a really big thing. I was super-happy about it.”

Things became less happy for Boggs that summer after the middle school-year-ending assembly, after learning that her father – who kept secret his tip from school officials to “not let your daughter miss that assembly” – had been diagnosed with chronic lung disease.

After learning that her 3-year-old sister had lost her ability to hear.

That her mother had to remain in Ohio to care for her own gravely ill parents.

“A lot of things happened,” Boggs said.

She left traditional school for a more convenient cyber school, only to drop out as a junior who had a child with her boyfriend.

“I just couldn’t do it after that,” Boggs said. “I was up all night with her.”

“She’s had her share of challenges”

While also caring for daughter Phoenix, the Venango County resident missed learning, missed achieving, missed her dream of becoming an entrepreneur and enrolled in the adult literacy program held a 15-minute drive away in neighboring Mercer County.

“She’s had her share of challenges,” said Sandy Marwick, director of the Grove City Education Center for Adults.

BC3 was awarded a four-year grant from the state Department of Education and administers funding for free adult literacy programs in Butler, Lawrence and Mercer counties. The Grove City Education Center for Adults’ five graduates in 2021 bring to 47 the number who have received high school equivalency diplomas in the past three years.

Boggs, of Nectarine, is among nearly two dozen students in programs in Butler, Lawrence and Mercer counties to pass tests in four subjects to earn a high school equivalency diploma during a BC3 fiscal year that recently ended.

“She was so impressive to us because she just powered through,” Marwick said. “She persevered. Many people would have stopped because it was just too much. But she continued on despite that.

“I’ve had men and women shed tears when they finally walk through the door and say, ‘I’ve known for a long time that I need to do this and here I am. I’ve finally come,’” Marwick said. “In many cases, transportation barriers, childcare issues and changing job schedules impact students’ ability to complete the program, but that was not the case with Andria.”

“I have blossomed into a perfect human being”

Early motivations students discuss when seeking a high school equivalency diploma center on getting a better job or keeping a job, said Barb Gade, grant director of BC3’s adult literacy program.

“But once they get to that third test, or that fourth test, they start looking at careers or other possibilities. They start looking at going to BC3, or to a trade school. It’s amazing seeing their horizons open up before them as they progress through earning their high school equivalency diploma.”

Her father, Boggs said, “knew I wanted to go to college from the very second I knew about knowledge.”

Boggs now finds herself about to move to Grove City, and about to enroll at BC3 in the spring toward pursuing an associate degree in psychology.

“I have blossomed into a perfect human being,” Boggs said.

“You can see much more confidence,” Marwick said. “For some students this is the first big accomplishment in their adult lives. So it’s a big deal.”

As it has been for the approximately 500 students who have earned high school equivalency diplomas through BC3’s adult literacy program in her 12 years, Gade said. The program began in 1986. The Grove City Education Center for Adults has offered services since about 1990, Marwick said.

Nearly 3,100 students in Pennsylvania earned a commonwealth secondary school diploma between July 1, 2020, and June 30, according to Mary Kay Peters, high school equivalency administrator, Bureau of Postsecondary and Adult Education with the state Department of Education.

Adult literacy programs prepare students to take General Education Development examinations that measure proficiency in language arts, which includes reading and writing; and in mathematics, science and social studies.

Diploma could add \$8,500 to annual pay

Full-time workers age 25 and older without a high school diploma in 2020 earned nearly \$8,500 less in a year than those with a high school diploma but without college credits, according to the U.S. Department of Labor’s Bureau of Labor Statistics.

About 9.8 percent of Venango County residents and 10.1 percent of Mercer County residents ages 25 and older did not hold a high school diploma between 2015 and 2019, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

Nearly a third of those who have pursued a high school equivalency diploma through the Grove City Education Center for Adults in the six years Marwick has been there have been at least 25 or older, she said. Some have been in their 60s. Her oldest to earn a high school equivalency diploma during BC3's 2020-2021 fiscal year was 22.

"I loved that they had teachers there whenever we needed," Boggs said. "I was a little anxious at first, so it was easier for me to talk to a person one-on-one than in a classroom."

Boggs commended instructors for helping her to understand ratios, and for helping her to prepare with practice tests – "And then," she said, "I would get a great grade on my main test."

Forty-two students in Mercer County and 38 in Venango County were among the nearly 11,700 in grades 7-12 who dropped out of Pennsylvania public schools, cyber schools or career and technical centers in the 2019-2020 academic year, according to the most recent state Department of Education information.

A dropout is a student who, for any reason other than death, leaves school before graduation without transferring to another school or institution, according to the state Department of Education. Among reasons provided by students who dropped out are academic or behavioral problems, disliking school, wanting to work or childcare.

"They might have just hit a really tough patch," Gade said.

The Grove City Area United Way, Grove City Rotary Club, All Good Things Thrift Store and individuals also fund the Grove City Education Center for Adults, Marwick said.

The Grove City Education Center for Adults holds in-person classes from 6 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. Mondays and Wednesdays and from 9 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. Tuesdays and Thursdays at 118 S. Center St. It also holds classes from 5 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. Tuesdays and Thursdays at Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in Greenville; from 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays and from 1 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. Mondays and Wednesdays at Pennsylvania CareerLink Mercer County in Sharon, and at the Mercer County Jail.