

The GED is Empowerment Through Education

One of the greatest gifts you can give anyone is to help that person unlock the power of knowledge.

When the sun sets New York City buzzes with activity. Thousands of adults from across the City journey to centers of learning. Their mission is to get a second chance, the opportunity to improve their skills to qualify them for entry into college. These students are studying for their General Educational Development or GED and the task is to master five subjects that include reading, math, history, social studies and science.

Most of the adults are immigrants and the classes are free. One does not have to be a citizen or permanent resident to be admitted to class and no such questions are asked. In fact the GED classes are perhaps the best endowment that New York and indeed the United States can bestow to immigrants.

The GED began in 1942 and was devised primarily to give soldiers returning from the War a chance to go to college. In 1972 the standards were changed to include a broader knowledge of academic subjects and in 1988 the essay was introduced. Further changes were made in 2002 and as recent as in 2013. But these changes have not deterred adults from enrolling in classes.

In the last forty years thousands have passed the GED and have articulated to college. Student enrollment is on a walk-in basis and a person should normally be over 21 years to be admitted to the program. Placement in classes is done after a series of math and reading tests. The length of time that it takes one to acquire the GED is between six to nine months.

In 1988 I received a call from the Office and Adult Education in Queens, New York. They wanted to know if I was interested to fill in for a teacher that was out for the evening. I agreed and was pleasantly surprised to find adults that were eager to learn. The class went well and I was invited to be a substitute on a number of occasions. These sites were spread all over the City and this gave me the chance to mix with students and their cultures. At the Hillside Avenue site, for instance, the classes were predominantly Haitian with some Jamaicans, Hispanics and persons from the Middle East.

In 1995 I was assigned to Richmond Hill High School in the heart of Queens, in New York. These classes could be a mini-United Nations with students from over 25 coun-

tries. Over the years there have been students that have braved the odds to realize their ambitions. A few years ago Chad Skeete walked into my room. He had taken the GED on a number of occasions without much success. When we spoke he was unsure of himself and his confidence was at a low ebb.

I sensed that Chad was ambitious but that he needed positive reinforcement. I invited him to sit in the class to get a feel of the atmosphere. One of the first instructions I gave him was to 'sign up for the exams' without even knowing his ability. Chad reluctantly signed up and worked with me. He duly took the test and one day out of the blue I received

pursue a career in Nursing.

Ajodhia Singh and his wife Khusharmattie are from Cove and John in Guyana. They were students in my class and they too passed and are grateful. Ajodhia now has a good job with the New York City Transit. Ajodhia's sister Dharamku-

When she started classes she was nervous but she told herself that she could do it. She said, "I was out of school for such a long time and now I had to start all over again. I dropped out of school in Form Four in Guyana and decided to go back to school and it was challenging." Ahalu-



Dr. Dhanpaul Narine

Mattie Esar migrated to the United States from Leguan in Guyana. She went to St. Stephens School in Leguan up to



Dr. Dhanpaul Narine (seated in front row) with the GED class of 2014 that are working hard to get to college.



SUCCESS STORIES: From left, the young ladies Ahalujia Leo, Julie Persaud and Mattie Esar have passed the GED and will go to college in 2015. Here they pose with their teacher Dr. Dhanpaul Narine who wish them well.

a phone call. Chad had passed and he was happy. He is now in college. Rudolph Persaud went to PS62 and studied hard for his GED. He now has a good job with CBS television and plans to further his studies. Jennifer Reekstin did not want her friends to hold her back. She too passed her GED and is about to

marie Raghubir also passed her GED. A few months ago three young ladies came to my class filled with ambition and willing to make the sacrifice necessary to pass the GED. Ahalujia Loe hails from Georgetown in Guyana. She decided to do her GED to get a better job and to further her studies.

jia had to juggle studies with a young family and this was not easy. After six months in the class she duly took her GED and passed it and she plans to go to college next year to study Accountancy and Computer Science. She wants to thank her teacher, family and her husband Sean Leo for supporting her.

Form Three. She was taken out of school 'to cook and clean' and when she was sixteen Mattie went to Canada before migrating to New York City. She heard about the GED and decided to further her education after 38 years. Mattie went to my class and worked hard. She passed with high scores and now she is preparing to go to college.

Julie Persaud enrolled in the program in 2013. She was determined from the start to do well and wouldn't allow herself to be distracted. Julie attended classes even during the snowstorms and signed up to take the exams. When the results were out she passed with high scores and will begin college in 2015.

Julie wants the community to know that education is a precious gift and people should take advantage of opportunity. The GED program in Queens is run by the Office of Adult and Continuing Education.

The Principal is Sandra Fleming and the Assistant Principal is Doreen Peart while the Supervisor at Richmond Hill High School is Ms. Sharon Thompson. If anyone is interested in enrolling for free classes please contact 1-718-557-2563 during office hours.