



Initiatives in Action: Adult Self Sufficiency Initiative



We can do more together.

Working with Initiative... *Lauren's Story*

I went through a painful divorce in 2003. As a single mother of two young boys, I knew that earning \$14 an hour wasn't going to give them the life I wanted for them. It was a nightmare. I worked more than 50 hours a week, and I took care of my two sons by myself. Every week my paycheck was the same



amount. After more than two years at the same job with no raise or advancement, it occurred to me that I absolutely needed more education.

ABOVE: Lauren, on a rare break from work and pharmacy school, relaxes with her boys, Desmond, 6 and Illijah, 8.

When I got back on my feet after the divorce, I started looking at schools, and the Community College of Aurora was the best fit. I researched tons of grants and scholarships and discovered Mile High United Way's L:earn scholarship.

The two L:earn scholarships I received paid for my entire pre-pharmacy degree at Community College of Aurora (CCA). I'm so grateful; I know I couldn't have done it without United Way support. At CCA I met others that had to drop out because they couldn't afford school. This motivated me to give back someday – when I have time and resources I'm going to donate to United Way, so others have the same opportunity that I had.

It was tough. I worked overnight shifts and took care of my kids while I was at CCA. At the same time, I was also applying to the School of Pharmacy at the University of Colorado Denver. I went through a four-month application marathon of form after form, intense interviews and testing. In my interview with the School of Pharmacy, I told them about my life experience. If you can work, go to school and raise two boys on your own, you can do anything.

The School of Pharmacy had 1,800 applicants, and I was one of 130 accepted. I just completed my first year of the four-year program. I love the diversity of positions you can hold in pharmacy from research to clinical and retail – the possibilities are endless. I'm looking forward to a rewarding career.

I work 20 hours a week when I'm in school and 50 hours per week in the summer. It's exhausting, but I'm motivated. The time away from my sons is very hard, but I know I'm building a better life for all of us.

Through this whole process, I've learned that you alone have to make it for yourself, especially if you have children depending on you. I went from two incomes to one,

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Working with Initiative - cont.

and I had to make a change. Life is not always fair, it's not always fun, but if you put the work into it, you'll see the return.

In May of 2011, I will be Dr. Lauren Johnson. I'll get to spend more time with my kids and be able to give them the life they deserve. I'll have time and resources to give back to Mile High United Way. That's what keeps me motivated.

For more information about our Adult Self Sufficiency Initiative, please visit our website at www.unitedwaydenver.org.

We can do more together.



Mile High United Way

L:earn
A Mile High United Way
Adult Self Sufficiency Project

Educational Assistance and Retraining Network



Mile High United Way

L:earn (Educational Assistance and Retraining Network) is a project within Mile High United Way's Adult Self Sufficiency initiative. L:earn provides scholarships and workforce development for low-income, working individuals in: developmental education, GEDs, licensure, certification, apprenticeships, Associate and Bachelor's Degrees in sectors such as health care, energy, construction and skilled trades, early care and education.

“ L:earn is not just a scholarship; it's a whole safety net of services that provide individuals like Lauren child-care, books, materials and one-on-one support from their school in addition to tuition assistance,” said Gaile Weisbly, senior director of community building. “Unfortunately, the odds are against these individuals when they go back to school and don't have extra supports, especially childcare. The L:earn project is a holistic approach to educating and retraining those most vulnerable in our community.”