



## Initiatives in Action: Adult Self Sufficiency Initiative



We can do more together.

### Showing the Importance of Higher Education

To get the job I wanted, I needed more education. The problem was, I didn't have enough money.

Attaining higher education is a quest I have been on for decades. I grew up in Wyoming and moved to Colorado in junior high. My boyfriend and I wanted to get married in high school, so I dropped out and became a stay at home mom. At the time it didn't seem like a big deal since he was earning a decent wage.

Of course I shouldn't have dropped out, but I was young and naive. I didn't have people in my life telling me how important education was. I had no idea what kind of impact it would have in my life.

I earned my GED eight years after dropping out and started working at Head Start, a preschool program for economically disadvantaged children. With the help of an associate's degree from a community college, I moved up in the ranks from teacher's assistant to preschool teacher.

I loved being a teacher. I have a genuine passion for kids, to see them learn and grow. Over the years I've been a part of thousands of disadvantaged children's lives. It's incredibly rewarding and I feel like I've made a difference.

After teaching for 20 years, I wanted more. I knew I could contribute to Head Start in a different way. In 2004 I applied for the supervising teacher position, which I held for 5 years. In 2008 an education manager position opened up, a great job that oversees the entire education area. They gave me the job, but I had to get my bachelor's degree to keep it.

I was excited for the incredible opportunity, but I had a lot to figure out, including how to pay for school.

It was at that time that I came into contact with Mile High United Way's L:earn scholarship. This scholarship has made all the difference in my life. Not only did it cover tu-

ition, but also books, fees and a laptop to use during the duration of my studies. It takes care of everything so you can focus on your education.

Head Start reimburses its employees for tuition, but only one class at a time. If it weren't for the L:earn scholarship, it would have taken me five years to obtain my degree. Instead, it will take me two years.



ABOVE: Juanita is getting her bachelor's degree with support through Mile High United Way's L:earn scholarship.

## Showing the Importance of Higher Education - cont.

I've been working incredibly hard for this dream. I go to school Monday through Thursday in addition to my full-time job and role as mother to three grown children. I'm divorced now, so I'm also supporting myself.

My sons are all married and have children of their own. They're very supportive. They know school takes up most of my time. When I have to cut visits with my grandkids short to do homework, they understand. Sometimes my oldest son and I do homework together.

My children call me their role model. They are always asking about my progress and my grades.

I know I'm sending them a big message by going back to school. My children and grandchildren see how important education is, they don't just hear about it. I talk to my young grandchildren about how important college is; I want that idea to be in their heads early on in life. I wish someone had done that for me.

I like to think that I'm changing my family's path for generations to come. I'm not just telling them education is important, I'm showing them.

I've wanted this for so long. It's time away from my family, so it's very valuable to me.

It's important for me to get this degree, not just so I can fulfill the promise I made to my employer, but for a promise I made myself. I've overcome so many hurdles to get here.

The knowledge I've attained through my education is something I apply every day in making sure Head Start is one of the best early childhood programs out there. So, my continuing education trickles back into the community to the kids who need it most.

I'll graduate from Metro State in May of 2009 with a major in human development and minor in early childhood education.

The bottom line is that if you don't have the money, you can't go to school. I've wanted to better myself and my mind and it's taken so long because of the lack of money. Without this scholarship, I couldn't have done it.

When you invest in Mile High United Way's Learn scholarship, you are changing the course of someone's life.

For more information about our Adult Self Sufficiency Initiative, please visit our website at [www.unitedwaydenver.org](http://www.unitedwaydenver.org).

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