



Initiatives in Action: Adult Self Sufficiency Initiative



We can do more together.

L:EARN Success Story

It's been a long road for Mercedes Vasquez and an inspiring ride for her entire family.

"I got my GED in 1995 and, now, in 2009, I'm earning my Bachelor's degree," says Mercedes. "I am so grateful to Mile High United Way for helping me reach my goal."

The mother of three, Vasquez has a passion for teaching children to reach their potential. It's that passion that guided her toward a career in early childhood development.

She dropped out of high school at a young age, married, had kids and then started working part time as a teaching assistant at an early education center.

"I have always loved watching children develop, progress," says Vasquez. But, without a formal education of her own she knew that she wouldn't progress much farther at work. So, she went back to school for her GED and then started taking night classes at a community college.

"I took one class here, two classes there. But I never made much progress," she says. "Plus, school is so expensive and I had a family to help support." Then Mercedes heard about Mile High United Way's L:earn project.

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, just like Mercedes, in: developmental education, GED's, 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 provided me with the tools I needed to make my educational dreams a reality," says Vasquez. "The L:earn scholarship not only paid for tuition and books, but it provided me with a laptop computer. All I had to do was give my time and be committed to my studies."

Now, just months away from graduation from Metro State, Mercedes works full-time at Rocky Mountain Ser's Northside Headstart in Denver.

"I really love what I do," she says, "and, I know that I am blessed."



Mile High United Way's L:earn project helped Mercedes Vasquez earn her degree while working full-time at Northside Headstart.

L:EARN Success Story - cont.

Mercedes' children caught the education bug from their mom and are committed to higher education. In fact, one of her sons recently received a scholarship to Regis University.

She says she has no big plans for graduation, but there will be a celebration, none the less; if not for her, for her family.

"They have been so supportive through the years," says Vasquez. "This was my goal and they helped me reach it."

Mercedes graduates in the summer with a Bachelor's Degree in Human Development and a minor in Early Childhood Education. Congratulations!

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

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Mile High United Way