



NextStep

LEARNING CENTER

TAKING THE NEXT STEP...

College Success Opens Doors for Next Step Graduates

The enrollment form at Next Step asks prospective students about their long-term goals. College is the most common answer. During a recent intake, a nervous new enrollee—we'll call her Julie—predictably wrote about her post-secondary hopes. When asked to elaborate she confessed apologetically, "I know I can't really go. I don't know why I even wrote that."

Julie, like more than half of her Next Step peers, would be the first in her family to graduate high school. Her mother made it through the 8th grade and her father "never talked about school."

For students who only imagine that they might complete high school, it is not surprising that college seems like a foolish thought hardly worth entertaining. Yet, studies show that having frequent conversations about college is one of the biggest predictors for ever actually attending. Julie had her first of many conversations about college that day. She learned that more than half of last year's Next Step graduates were already enrolled in post-secondary institutions, with more set to enroll in college next spring. She also learned that she would not have to take the steps towards matriculation alone, as Next Step has a comprehensive and highly successful college

COLLEGE SUCCESS STORY: LANA ABDELRAHMAN

NEXT STEP ENROLLMENT: 2011

GRADUATION DATE: GED, 2012

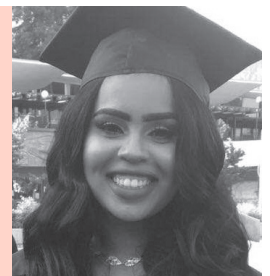
COLLEGE ENROLLMENT: 2012

COLLEGE GRADUATION: A.A. Liberal Arts, A.S. Political Science, Berkeley City College, 2016

CURRENT GOALS: Enrolled at UC Santa Cruz

PROFILE: Lana dropped out of high school after she was victimized on campus. She stayed busy by babysitting, helping at home and volunteering, but knew she didn't want to settle for a future without the success that a college education could bring. When she enrolled at Next Step she worked hard to pass her GED and start community

college all within a year's time. She explored majors at three Peralta campuses and considered law enforcement as a career, so while continuing to attend school full-time, Lana completed the Oakland Police Cadet Academy. Her personal experience, college courses and the academy all helped her narrow her interest to Political Science. Lana explains her career goals: "After seeing that victims have a difficult time with the legal system, I plan to use my degree and the skills I gain in political science to ease their process of searching for justice. I myself can relate to their struggle and—through my experience as a cadet—I was able to determine that becoming a public interest lawyer best fits my passion to help victims."



transition program.

Next Step's college program includes:

- Intensive, individual counseling
- College application and matriculation services
- Financial planning and aid application assistance
- Scholarships of up to \$1,500 a year
- Ongoing mentorship and tutoring

Jennie Emard has run the program for close to a decade, and the results defy the statistics. Next Step students complete college at more than three times the national rate for GED graduates. Jennie states, "Helping our students achieve their educational goals to improve their lives and the lives of their families is a fight for social justice." She is referring to the disproportionately low college graduation rates for poor students and students of color. Financial constraints, inadequate academic preparation, and a lack of support are commonly cited factors for these discrepancies; challenges that Next Step's program helps students overcome.

Investing in college success makes sound financial sense for Next Step graduates by providing a pathway out of poverty; moreover, as a community we all benefit when each of us is able to fulfill our human potential. Jennie tells us, "There just isn't enough room to state here all the ways our work is important and life changing. More and more people could be left behind without the opportunity to realize their full potential and personal happiness; all of this and more is why I continue to be passionate in my position."

COLLEGE SUCCESS STORY: CAMELLIA LEROY

NEXT STEP ENROLLMENT: 2013

GRADUATION DATE: GED, 2014

COLLEGE ENROLLMENT: College of Alameda, spring 2014

COLLEGE GRADUATION: Certificate in Office Administration for the Logistics Industry. Fall, 2016

CURRENT GOALS: : On track to receive an Associate Degree in Business.

PROFILE: After two unsuccessful attempts at college without support and without a high school diploma, Camellia was forced to pause her education in order to work. She never gave up her college dreams, and wanted to inspire her two daughters to grow up with their sights on a college education. At Next Step, she built her academic foundation, earned her GED and returned to community college.

Camellia says, "It's been an entirely different experience this time around in college because Next Step made me more academically prepared, and I don't have to figure out how to pay for everything on my own while also taking care of my grandmother and my girls. Jennie's check-ins and guidance keep me on track. Thank you to everyone at Next Step!"



COLLEGE SUCCESS STORY: BRUCE PELLETIER

NEXT STEP ENROLLMENT: 2012

GRADUATION DATE: GED, fall 2012

COLLEGE ENROLLMENT: College of Alameda, spring 2014

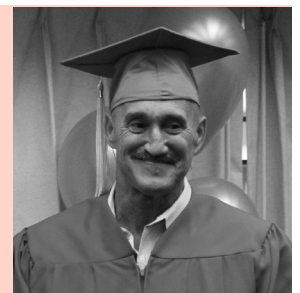
COLLEGE GRADUATION: A.A. in Language Arts with honors, spring 2016 and Warehouse Operations Certificate, spring 2013

CURRENT GOALS: On track to receive an A.A. degree in Communication in fall 2016.

PROFILE: After 20 years of struggle with substance abuse and homelessness, Bruce changed his life. "My escape

from the abyss came one morning while I was lying in bed. With my window open, I heard the sounds of life... I pictured people having destinations, a purpose in life. I was suddenly struck by the realization that I still had many dreams myself and goals to accomplish—my children and family to reconnect with. From that moment on, I became determined to join the 4 percent club." Bruce is referring to the statistic that only 4% of heroin addicts maintain sobriety long-term.

Bruce has begun a career as a Professional Public Speaker and is an activist for policy change and increased funding for treatment of substance abuse.



ONE YEAR LATER: CONTINUING THE NEXT STEP LEGACY

Lisa Stringer Reflects on Her First Ten Months as Executive Director

It has been one year since I first interviewed at Next Step Learning Center, and what a year it has been! From the moment I walked in, I knew Next Step was a special place. I immediately felt the warmth of the staff, the dedication and energy of the students and volunteer tutors, and the guiding wisdom of the founding Sisters. As I assumed leadership responsibility in January of 2016, I had two main priorities: first, carry forward the legacy of strengthening Oakland families through education, and, second, grow programs to meet the complex needs of our changing community.

CARRYING FORWARD A LEGACY

Next Step has a history of success; as students will tell you, we are a school like no other. After so many struggles in traditional learning environments, students experience the center as an oasis of personal attention and loving support. I cherish this inheritance, and am tremendously lucky to have been handed such a passionate and talented community of Next Step staff, board and volunteers. In addition, the integrity and brilliance of Sisters Cynthia and Rosemary has been passed on through a strong infrastructure and a valuable overlap of transition time together. Reflecting today, I feel strongly that the legacy of Next Step is indomitable. Together we are ensuring that the mission and values of the school endure to benefit future generations.



New ED Lisa Stringer gets to know volunteer tutors



Our mission is as relevant today as it was two decades ago. To prepare our growing student body for an evolving and unforgiving job market, we must deepen and expand programs.

GROWING PROGRAMS

In an ideal world, Next Step would not have needed a new ED. We could have closed shop, confident that no child had been “left behind” and there were no Oakland adults in need of basic education. Alas, Oakland Unified School District reports a drop-out rate of over 45% for young men of color in West and East Oakland. Poor and disabled students also leave school before graduating at shockingly high rates. Our mission is as relevant today as it was two decades ago. To prepare our growing student body for an evolving and unforgiving job market, we must deepen and expand programs. In the past six months, Next Step has added a high school diploma program, college bridge services, and a satellite site in East Oakland. Our students are demonstrating greater academic gains than ever before. Read more about these developments in this newsletter, and I welcome any conversations or questions.

I want to thank Next Step’s staff, volunteer tutors, financial investors, board and students for welcoming me, continuing the mission, and embracing change. I look forward to many years to come.

A Message from Sr. Cynthia

During last year's carefully planned leadership transition process at Next Step, every constituency surveyed—Board, staff, volunteers, students, donors, and the two of us as Co-Directors—said that their greatest hope was that Next Step's special mission and culture would continue to thrive. That culture of welcome, deep respect, affirmation, and belief in each person's potential has transformed lives, one person at a time, one day at a time for over 21 years.

I had the joy of attending Next Step's Graduation and Adult Education Honor Society Induction in August—a wonderful event! From Lisa's warm and affirming words of welcome, to the sincerely loving tributes given by individual staff members who introduced the honorees, to the students' glowing faces and tears of joy, it was clear that the Next Step mission and culture we all value so much is alive and thriving. Thank you, each one of you, who makes it so!



A Message from Sr. Rosemary

Howard Thurman speaks of the unfolding of a Dream: “If the embodiment of the dream takes the form of an institution it means that at the center of the institution there is a living, pulsing core which guarantees an increasing dimension of creativity.” Next Step's Board was blessed last fall in hiring Lisa Stringer, Next Step's Executive Director, who has certainly grown Next Step's unique learning environment with an expansion of creativity that compels students to wholeheartedly engage in continuing their education. The Dream that birthed Next Step continues to unfold. As expressed by one of our volunteer tutors, “Next Step is guiding students to levels of optimism, self-confidence and achievements that they might not have believed possible.”

Thank you for your commitment of support in growing Next Step's mission of transforming lives through education.

"I'm showing my daughter that we can push for a better life."



NEXT STEP STUDENT SPOTLIGHTS



ASHLEY FIELD

AGE: 31

NEXT STEP ENROLLMENT: 2016

CURRENTLY: Co-enrolled in the high school diploma program and college

ENJOYS: Inspiring her daughter to succeed in school

Ashley is a dedicated and loving mother to her nine-year old daughter, and she has raised her to take pride in her studies. One day Ashley's daughter asked, "Mommy, did you ever graduate?" These words hit Ashley hard, as she had left high school in the 11th grade. She vowed there

and then to return to school.

Since coming to Next Step, Ashley has been hard at work completing her high school credits. Instead of waiting to start college, she joined our college co-enrollment program. After receiving an A in her first class this summer, she is now taking English at Laney. She attends Next Step regularly to work on high school units and get academic support from tutors on her college assignments. Never slowing down, Ashley juggles a new part-time job with college, high school and being a terrific mom!

"I love learning; it is a positive thing for me because I have a lot of outside stresses. I'm showing my daughter that we can push ourselves for a better life. Next Step is my second family."



SUMMER NGUYEN

AGE: 30

NEXT STEP ENROLLMENT: 2014

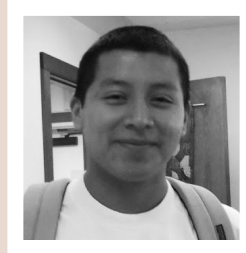
CURRENTLY: Enrolled in college

ENJOYS: Learning new things and cooking for Next Step staff, volunteers and students!

GOALS: Get good grades and become a US Citizen.

Summer studied diligently for two years before passing her HiSET in June 2016. Originally from Vietnam, she recently obtained her work permit and looks forward to adding a job to her busy schedule.

"I just want to thank Next Step... my tutor who stood by me, my teachers, everyone; you are my family."



LARRY BAMACA

AGE: 17

NEXT STEP ENROLLMENT: 2016

CURRENTLY: High school diploma program

ENJOYS: Algebra!

GOALS: Graduate spring 2017, then onto college!

Like many high school seniors, Larry realized he was not on track to graduate. He also needed to support himself and his family while completing his studies. Larry attends Next Step every morning and works full time in the evenings.

"Next Step is different than other schools because of all the individual help and support I get."



CHRISLUCIA BROWN-KIRK

AGE: 50

NEXT STEP ENROLLMENT: 2013

GRADUATION DATE: GED, Dec. 2015 / College Bridge class, 2016

CURRENTLY: Merritt College

A hardworking mother of ten, Chrislucia received a B in her first college class this summer and is now enrolled in a full course load as she pursues a career in the medical field.

"I was so intimidated when I started college, but I stuck with it and learned a lot. I am so proud of myself!"

SEEING LIVES TRANSFORMED:

A Night to Remember

By Sister Marcia Frideger, SNJM, Board Member

Smiles, cheers, pride, laughter, and tears of gratitude filled the packed room at Next Step Learning Center on August 24, as forty-four students, bedecked in caps and gowns, celebrated milestones in their lives. Lisa Stringer, the new Executive Director, warmly welcomed the exuberant crowd of family and friends. Sister Cynthia Canning, one of the former Co-Directors of Next Step was in the audience to cheer on these adults, who have worked so diligently to overcome obstacles. A former Next Step student, William Ochoa, who completed his Bachelor's degree in sociology at CSU East Bay and is now in graduate school at Mills College, spoke about how his experience with the transformative power of education has led to his plans to give back to the community by educating others. The love for their students and commitment to their success was so evident as three of the faculty/staff members introduced students to the audience.

HONOR SOCIETY

Karen Matza, Next Step's Literacy Instructor, presented eight students who were honored by the National Adult Honor Society. These students, dedicated to steady progress towards their own educational goals, not only possess the attributes of ideal adult students, but they inspire and encourage other students to achieve success.



HIGH SCHOOL SUCCESS

Lee Gargagliano, the High School Equivalency Coordinator, introduced the 28 high school graduates with the words: "You are all here because it wasn't easy, and we are proud of you BECAUSE it wasn't easy." He



Current student, Adia, congratulates her classmate, Coy, on earning his GED

continued by stating that it is the spirit and commitment to bettering their situations, not just the diploma, that transforms their lives and will carry them through to their own next steps. To the beaming crowd, he spoke of the ways in which their success "will begin to transform your loved ones as well—infecting your children, partners, siblings, and parents in surprising and unpredictable ways." Twenty-eight students celebrated their high school graduations: twenty-two achieved high school equivalency, and six earned their high school diplomas.



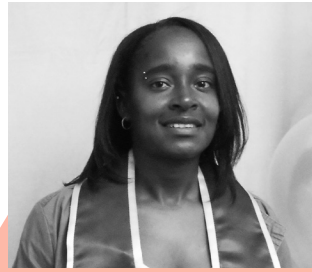
BEYOND HIGH SCHOOL— SUCCESS IN COLLEGE

A growing part of the Next Step Learning Center is the number of students enrolling in colleges and continuing to be supported by the NSLC staff. On this night, eight college students were introduced by Jennie Emard, the College Transition Coordinator. Two of these students have completed bachelor's degrees, three have received their A.A. degrees, and three more have received certificates (in drug and alcohol counseling and early childhood education).

Following the presentations and reception of diplomas, students shared reflections about their experiences. Gratitude for all those who supported them—from family, friends, Next Step staff and volunteer tutors was the prominent theme. For many, who found earlier educational experiences challenging or depressing, the warmth and welcome of NSLC tutors, directors, faculty, and staff enabled them to believe in themselves and push forward. The desire to model for their children the importance of education and persistence impelled several to continue at Next Step. For some, life events and crises meant that they had to leave Next Step and re-enter the program several times. A final highlight of the evening was a saxophone performance by Coy McAllister, one of the high school graduates, whose enthusiasm included blowing his horn, literally.



Happy graduate, Raphael, celebrates with his proud tutor, Kathleen



*Myla Wofford
Inducted into the National Adult
Honor Society for outstanding
progress in reading*



*De'Juana Howard
Celebrated her Certificate
of Achievement in Early
Childhood Development from
Merritt College*



*Juana Aguirre
Graduated with her high
school diploma and is now
working full time*



*Matthew Perez
Received his high school
diploma and is now in college*

NEXT STEPS FOR NEXT STEP STUDENTS

And what are the high school graduates doing now? Fourteen of them are attending college, with two more preparing to start college next semester. Nine are working full time—two in good-paying union jobs, now that they have high school equivalencies. One received her green card and is fully employed.

As a Board member and a Sister of the Holy Names, I couldn't keep from being teary-eyed as I marveled at the courage and grit of these men and women who push against odds much greater than I have ever known. It is an honor to be with these valiant students who take hold of life and work for a future that is better for themselves and their families. It is a privilege to see the work that the dedicated volunteers, staff, and new director are doing to continue and expand the great work of educating adults and contributing to their transformation.

BUILDING A BRIDGE TO COLLEGE SUCCESS

by Lee Gargagliano

Enrolling in college for the first time is an exciting step, and more Next Step students than ever before are making the leap to post-secondary education. For the vast majority, they are the first in their family to attend college, and the excitement is mixed with a fear of the unknown. This past spring Next Step debuted a brand new College Readiness Bridge Class, designed to prepare our students as they transition from their high school studies into further education as part of Next Step's College Program.

The class, developed and taught collaboratively by Lee and Jennie Emard (the HiSET and College Coordinator respectively), serves several purposes. First, the class seeks to mimic some of the aspects of courses that students will take in college; second, it seeks to build some of the academic foundations that will support students in their initial classes; third, it provides information about college and what students can expect and need to know before they start. As one graduate said, "It gets you prepared for college classes—what to do and what to expect."

The course is designed like a college course, with a syllabus and homework assignments. An internet portal



Graduates Summer and Raphael congratulate each other on completing high school and starting college.

(a staple in most current college courses) supplements class work, where students can participate in discussions and download assignments. The academic skills covered include note taking, summarizing and reflecting on reading—helping students to prepare effectively for tests and writing assignments.

Finally, Jennie joins the class one day a week in order to introduce students to programs at local colleges, breaking down financial aid, matriculation and class selection. In the words of one student: "The class

tackles a wide array of lessons in a short time. It also allows the students to express emotions and a lot of 1-on-1 learning."

The class has been a huge success, full of rich discussion and personal growth. Many of the students from the first two cohorts of the class have already gone on to enroll in community college and are using the skills that we built together. As one young student expressed: "Thank you for the opportunity of being in a college [bridge] class. It has changed my perspective and influenced me to go to college."

COLLEGE SUCCESS STORY: INEZY WILLIAMS



NEXT STEP ENROLLMENT: 2011

GRADUATION DATE: GED, fall 2013

COLLEGE ENROLLMENT: Merritt College, spring 2014

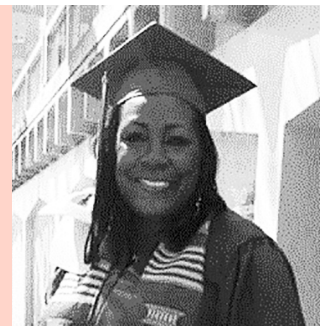
COLLEGE GRADUATION: Certificate of Achievement: Community Social Services/Substance Abuse, spring 2016

CURRENT GOALS: On track to receive her Associate Degree with honors by 2018.

PROFILE: Inezy has overcome learning challenges, anxiety, and personal loss while staying in school. She balances school, work, interning at the Berkeley Drop-in Center,

and is a loving mother and grandmother.

"My life history has led to my passion today. I was a drug addict for 32 years and saw some very difficult, hopeless times and people. I was one of them. I worked hard to get clean and experienced restoration through prayer and counseling. It was and is vital to my survival. Today I give back to my community through volunteering, but I am ready to turn my experience into a career that is satisfying because I will be applying my life lessons as well as what I learn in school to help others turn their life around."



A SECOND CHANCE

Next Step Starts a New High School Diploma Program

On a sunny Friday afternoon in July 2016, Byron Moncrease turned in his final economics essay. In doing so, he became the third student ever to earn a high school diploma at Next Step. “I am so proud right now!” said Byron as he signed the final paper work. “I always thought it was too late for me to go back to high school—like all those years were wasted and the credits I earned were worthless.”

Byron’s diploma is possible due to a new Next Step partnership with Five Keys Charter School, an accredited program designed exclusively for older students aiming to complete their high school credits. The program is ideal for adults such as Byron, who went up to 12th grade as a teen but dropped out before graduating. Moncrease had attended Next Step sporadically for several years, but found the GED test to be overwhelming. “I never tested well,” he explained. “All that memorization and working under the pressure of being timed...I just lost motivation.”



Byron shows off his high school diploma with pride.

When the program started in April, Moncrease was one of the first to bring in his old transcripts. Upon discovering he needed just fifteen credits to graduate, Byron eagerly began work on 12th grade English and the dreaded economics. Five Keys provides state-approved curriculum for each required high-school class, and Next Step



High School teacher, Cathy, studies with student Devonte White and other Next Step diploma candidates.

students complete the course work at their own pace. Byron admits to program was not easy, and attributes his success to the tutors and staff at Next Step who coached him through the challenging assignments. “I had one tutor who ran his own business,” recalls Moncrease. “He explained economics in the real world, and that helped a lot more than reading the book.”

Like everything at Next Step, our volunteer tutors are the key to

the program’s success. Five Keys leverages a full time teacher, Cathy Lee-Everett, on site at Next Step, who assigns and grades the work. While she also makes time for teaching, the individual assistance of tutors is essential. “I am so lucky to be here because of all the support we get from the volunteer tutors,” says Cathy. “It really makes all the difference in the world.”

Byron is now working in a union job—a position that required proof of graduation. The diploma option offers some flexibility for working adults. “The program allowed me to complete homework at night, which was perfect because I was in a job training program during the day,” he shared. “I don’t know how to thank Next Step for the doors they have opened for me.”

Currently, over forty students are working towards completing their high school diplomas at Next Step. Six students have already graduated, with four now in college and the other two working full time. Thanks to this new program, many students have a second chance. As one graduate, Juana Agurrie shared, “I had given up on my diploma, but now I am a graduate!”

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

The new our high school diploma program was made possible through the generous contributions of individual donors. Program expansion is essential as we grow to meet the emerging educational needs of our community. Such endeavors would not be possible without your support. Deep gratitude goes out to our financial contributors.

CELEBRATING SUCCESS

Since our inception, close to **800** former high school drop-outs have graduated as a direct result of the intensive education programs at Next Step Learning Center!

In the past year alone, **38** Next Step students graduated with their high school equivalency or high school diploma.

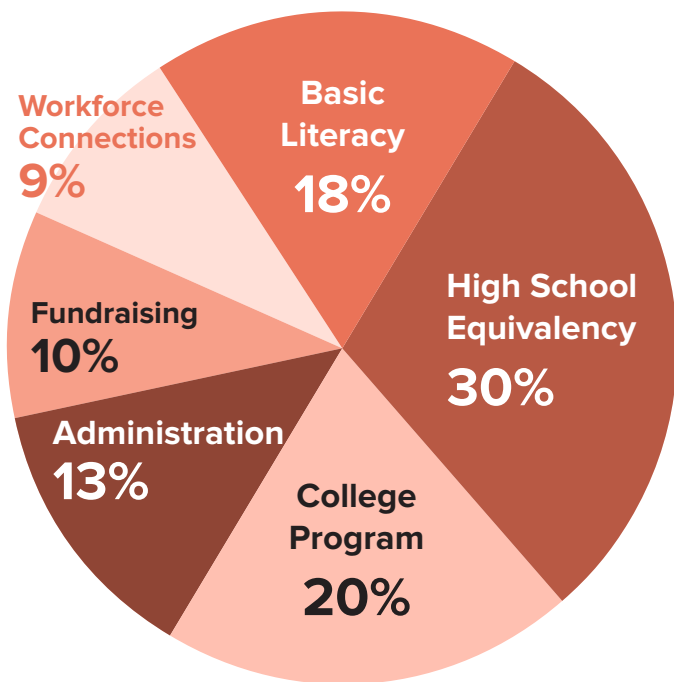
Over **400** students were served in our literacy and basic education programs, with 87% increasing their basic skills after two months of attendance.

In just the past three years, more than **100** students have gained employment as a result of our Workforce Connections program.

More than **100** Next Step graduates have transitioned to college. In the last year alone, **8** have completed post-secondary degrees.

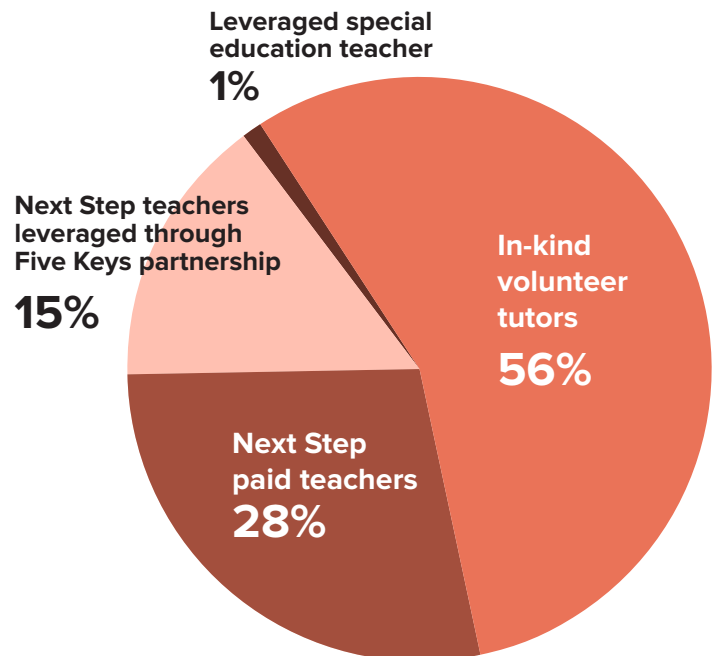
RESOURCES FOR TRANSFORMATION

Here is how we invest our resources:
This year's budget is \$657,000



COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Next Step provides individualized, intensive tutoring. This is only possible because of Community and volunteer support. Here is where are teaching hours come from.



THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

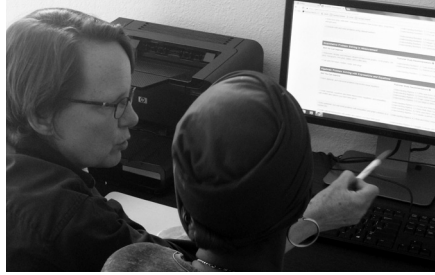
Thank you to our financial sponsors for your philanthropy, to our dedicated volunteer tutors for being the heart of Next Step, to the staff and board for all your work and wisdom, and to our students for inspiring us.

NEXT STEP EXPANDS TO EAST OAKLAND

Twenty-two years ago, Next Step's founders responded to a need in West Oakland: Three Sisters of the Holy Names were compelled by the lack of educational programming in the area and were driven by the mission to "seek the full development of the human person through education." This same spirit is what motivated us this year to bring our model of personalized tutoring to East Oakland—a part of the city with few educational options and shockingly high drop-out rates. Next Step began education programming in East Oakland in June of 2016.

Next Step now provides basic education, GED preparation and college readiness programs to East Oakland youth through a partnership with the Youth Employment Partnership (YEP)—an established job training program for out-of-school youth aged 17 through 24 years. A new Next Step teacher named Becky Abbott works at the site. She is joined by volunteer tutors and helped by Lee and Jennie who teach college skills. Becky tells us about her experience:

Over a decade ago, when I worked with young people involved in the criminal justice system, I heard about YEP, an Oakland non-profit dedicated to providing job training to young adults. I made quite a few referrals, appreciating their focus on economic sustainability for youth who so often lack any real opportunities to tap into the robust Bay Area economy. The fact that YEP pays their participants to do job training and complete their high school education or GED provides the missing link that often keeps young people from completing such programs. In reality, it's very difficult to focus on education if you really need an income and have bills to pay today.



And now I teach math here! To be able to work at YEP and contribute to their mission has been the completion of circle for me personally, and it is also a welcome chance to provide concrete support to young people doing their best to get ahead of the low expectations and lack of opportunity that they have faced throughout their

lives. I will tell you about a couple of them, although I know I could tell a similar story about every one of the students at YEP.

Hector came to math tutoring with a grim look on his face. "I can't do math," he said gruffly. His classmate, Phatima, reassured him, and sat with him to help. These students are always there for each other. Side by side for the first few weeks, working on fractions. Then Phatima had to move on to the next phase of the program and Hector faced fractions on his own. As it turned out, Hector is pretty good at math. He now comes in with a smile, ready to get to work, and demonstrates a disciplined approach to conquering what had seemed impossible the first day. Recently he said "I still don't like it, but I know I can do it. I'm going to get this GED!"

Lakeisha is a young woman with a lot of responsibilities, which you can tell from her firm voice and no nonsense attitude. After all, she is the sole parent of a five year old son, and not yet twenty herself. She has a job through YEP at the Oakland Airport, studies for her GED, completes her YEP writing assignments, and takes and picks up her son from school every day. Currently she is studying for her GED science test and appreciates the time her NSLC tutor, Meg, takes to explain the science concepts behind the questions. She comes to class with a positive attitude every day, and it is clear that her son is the center of her life and that fulfilling her goals will only make his life better.



NEXT STEP TUTORS HEAD TO EAST OAKLAND!

Dedicated Next Step tutors, Meg and Bob, work with YEP students, Lakeisha and Imane preparing for their math and science GED tests. Thank you Bob and Meg!





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OUR MISSION

Next Step Learning Center believes in the resilience of the human spirit and in each person's ability to learn and to change. We support each person by providing a caring environment, bridges to the business, civic, and educational community, and a strong support and follow-up system.

