

NextStep

LEARNING CENTER

Crossing the Finish Line

THE PATH TO GRADUATION

By Karen Matza, Next Step Literacy Teacher

If you meet Alaina in the hallways of Next Step, you might notice that she's beaming, bursting with pride. Exuding an air of confidence mixed with a tinge of wonder—like she can't quite believe how close she is, how it's really happening. Page by page, packet by packet, she's plowing through these last remaining high school units; each sentence she reads, each question she answers is bringing her one step closer to earning her high school diploma.

None of it is easy, but throughout her years at Next Step (NS) Alaina has drawn on her extraordinary patience and determination to push through. With a positive attitude and consistent focus, Alaina spent countless hours building her skills in the NS Literacy Program: learning the basics of reading and spelling, steadily increasing proficiency, fluency and comprehension, developing into an engaged, confident reader. When the opportunity to begin work on her high school diploma through the NS/Five Keys program presented itself, Alaina was enthusiastically up for the task.

School hasn't always been a success story for Alaina. In fact, before coming to NS, Alaina's school experience was characterized by struggle and negativity—being placed in often dysfunctional “special” classes for students with learning and behavior issues, experiencing frustration and bursts of anger that made her want to lash out against other kids. She recounts how she got into fights—sometimes wanting to get sent home to escape the chaos and negativity. School wasn't the

only challenge Alaina faced.

In her early teens, Alaina experienced a significant trauma—compounding

Alaina's difficulties at school and impacting all aspects of her life.

When Alaina enrolled at NS at the end of 2012, she finally found a school environment where she could thrive, where her willingness to work hard and amazing capacity to push forward were met with support, encouragement, and effective educational programs.

There is a synergy at NS, where the combined efforts of the entire community (staff, tutors, supporters, and students) can result in transformative change. For Alaina, that transformation has meant re-envisioning herself as smart and capable young woman, a student who loves to read, makes connections and sees value in learning... a student who understands that effort, sometimes exerted on a monumental scale, yields life-changing results.

“I had a lot of obstacles,” Alaina reflects “It was difficult, but I fought through it. Plenty of times I thought of giving up... but your [the staff and tutors'] support kept me going.” Alaina's advice to others: “Never give up, don't doubt yourself—if you put your mind to it you can do it!”



COLLEGE BOUND

“Before I came to Next Step, I didn’t have any hope that I would pass my tests”

During the last two weeks of 2017’s stormy March, sisters My and Van waited. As hundreds of Next Step students had done before them, they had taken their final high school equivalency test. Now, after a year and a half of almost daily study, there was nothing left to do but wait for the results and hope.

“I remember their first day,” recalled Peggy Presley, Next Step’s Program Director. “They were so shy and unsure.” Van remembers it vividly too. “When I came to Next Step Learning Center, I was so worried,” she says with a bashful smile. “I got a serious headache. My head felt like it had guns inside fighting each other!”

Each Next Step student faces unique challenges when they walk through our doors. For some it is a life-long fear of math, for others it is dyslexia or gaps in education due to homelessness or foster care placements. Often, the biggest hurdle is an inner voice that tell us we are not worth it. For My and Van, recent immigrants from Viet Nam, it was English. Van (pronounced Vong) the older of the two, explains, “My main problem is English: it’s a big, stiff rock that is hard to move!” My nods vigorously, adding, “Before I came to Next Step, I couldn’t understand what people said and I didn’t have any hope that I would pass my tests.”



Volunteer tutors and dedication were the key to My and Van’s success. “Day by day, I went to Next Step and improved my English,” Van says. My shares, “After Next Step, everything became easier. I worked with tutors and they taught me so many new things, explaining to me slowly until I got it.”

Finally, the wait is over. My and Van passed all five of their tests and now have what they have wanted for a very long time: a high school equivalency diploma and— even more importantly—a ticket to college. “It is what we want,” a sincere My shares. “We want to learn new things and have a better life.”

“They are blossoming,” says Peggy as she watches the two head down the hall to Next Step’s College Bridge class. My and Van will start college at Laney this summer.



“I love working with adults because they know why they are here and what they want out of the experience. The most rewarding part of my job is working with students who have been slogging away at their high school equivalency for months or even years and supporting them as they clear that final hurdle. Often I find that in the process, students have transformed their feelings about a given subject—whereas math used to produce anxiety, now it has become fun.”

LEE GARGAGLIANO, NEXT STEP HIGH SCHOOL EQUIVALENCY COORDINATOR



A TUTOR'S STORY BY KAREN CARLSON

My—what a great student! I feel so lucky to have been able to work with her. She worked hard, even at home on the extra reading and writing assignments I gave her. She was always prepared and thoughtful, looking up the words and asking a lot of questions, always a sign of a good learner. It was a real pleasure to work with someone as optimistic and eager to succeed as My. Congratulations!

My one morning a week spent with My To and others is a highlight of my post-retirement life. After I retired from teaching ESL at Laney College, I wasn't doing much of interest besides starting to make a dent in the teetering pile of books by my chair. When I heard about the program, I had a feeling that this might be a perfect place for me. Another volunteer, Karen Platt, led me to your doors, and about two years ago, quietly persuasive Sister Rosemary let me in. My thanks to all of you incredible students and the amazing Peggy for this wonderful opportunity to give and receive.



A TUTOR'S STORY BY HELEN GERKEN

Van and I had been making our way through one of the workbooks, when we came upon an excerpt from an old mystery, *The Ghostway*, in which a young girl disappears. Van wondered what had happened to her. Van wondered about a lot of things. I brought in maps to show the Navajo Reservation where the story is set and more maps so she could show me where she had lived in Vietnam. I got a copy of *The Ghostway* so we could read the story together, taking turns with the pages, at the end of our lessons.

All this was in addition to our regular work reading and writing. Van told me that she had never paid any attention to grammar and vocabulary in her high school English classes in Vietnam, because she “hated it so much,” she said with a giggle. A lot of what we did together was to take her writing and “English it up,” as we called it.

When she saw me in the morning she was always all smiles and ready to go. While she worked, her concentration practically singed the pages, and she worked all the time. She wore me out on a regular basis, and both of us turned to Jim Chee, Navajo Tribal Police officer, for “dessert,” at the end of each session.

From the moment I met her, I felt great rapport with Van. She is charming and funny and quick, curious and interested. She has great powers of concentration and a retentive mind. It was a pleasure and an honor to work with her. When she told me she'd passed her last test, I told her, “The sky's the limit!” and I truly believe that's true for her. Oh, and if you're wondering, yes, we did finish the Jim Chee story, and Van got to keep her copy.

THANK YOU!

Over the past year, many cherished Next Step tutors and supporters donated generously to a scholarship fund dedicated to Sisters Cynthia Canning and Rosemary Delaney—Next Step’s founders and co-directors of 21 years. Thanks to your generosity, eight college students were awarded Sister’s Scholarships in the past year. Here is an update of just some of the grateful recipients...

CHASHONN

“I walked in the door of Next Step as a high school drop-out. Today, I walk out with my AA in psychology and an acceptance letter to San Francisco State. When I opened the acceptance letter, my first reaction was joyful tears...I had fulfilled my own prophecy through hard work!”



INEZY

After completing her college certificate in Community Social Services this semester, Inezy is qualified to apply for substance abuse counseling jobs while she finishes her AA.



“I am ready to pursue my life passion of helping others overcome addiction!”

During the years I had the pleasure of working with Inezy, my admiration for her continued to grow. Through hard work, tenacity, and faith, she overcame significant challenges and disappointments not only to earn her GED but to become a successful college student and informed voter. I am so very proud of her and all that she has accomplished.

—Randi Voorhies, Next Step tutor

QUINTON

“Sleep is for billionaires,” is Quinton’s favorite quote. He graduates this semester with his AA in sociology. Quinton originally left high school out of necessity to care for his sick mom, but found his way to Next Step and worked hard to earn his GED. The next step for Quinton? Well, he has been accepted to UC Davis, UC Santa Cruz and UC Berkeley... so many choices!



NATHANIEL

Having completed the core classes for an Associate Degree in Multi-Media Studies, Nathaniel has enough units to

join the Union for Theatrical Stage Employees and fulfill his dream of working as a stagehand.

Nathaniel and I worked together regularly as we prepared for his GED in 2013. Despite learning challenges that led to his dropping out of high school in the 10th grade, Nathaniel committed himself to the Next Step challenge and embraced its philosophy of hard work, trust and faith which led to his success on the exam and to his eventual study in college.

—Steve Ghidinelli, Next Step tutor



ALAN

After surviving a grave car accident as a child, Alan vowed to become a nurse. He works full time and takes two college classes each semester. Now in his second year, Alan maintains an impressive GPA in tough classes as he works towards admission to a nursing program. Working with Alan on his GED was one of the highlights of my time here. You come with the hope of helping someone reach their goals. I always found Alan to be extremely motivated and eager to learn. He balanced a difficult work and life schedule with his commitment to his academic goals. It was rewarding for me to see him begin to reach those goals; it made me feel happy to see him move forward. Just as important to me was our relationship. Alan and I made a connection built upon mutual respect and understanding.

My time with Alan represents what education should be about. A true education is much more than a series of achievements but a commitment to grow as a human being. I am excited for Alan and the contributions he will make to our community in the future.

—Bob Ratto, Next Step tutor



INVESTING IN A STRONGER OAKLAND

Building a stronger Oakland starts with opportunity, and those opportunities start in the classroom. While graduating high school is essential to survival, it is a college education that makes thriving possible. New research proves what many of us have known intuitively for years: there is a direct correlation between the educational attainment and the health of our neighborhoods.

The advantages of a college degree for individuals and families are well documented: improved job prospects, better health, and—for residents of the Bay Area—an average of \$500 dollars more a week in income. College grads even report higher rates of happiness and live longer lives.

The benefits of a college degree, however, extend far beyond the home. College graduates have:

- Higher rates of civic engagement
- Higher volunteer rates
- Healthier children
- Lower crime rates
- Higher voter turnout

As it turns out, we all do better as a whole when each person is able to pursue their dreams of higher education.

Ten years ago, the founding Sisters set out to create a college-going culture at Next Step. We are excited to report that this original goal has been met. In the first semester of the program, three students enrolled; in the coming year, more than 50 Next Step graduates will be in college!

NEXT STEP'S COLLEGE PROGRAM SUPPORTS LOW INCOME, FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS

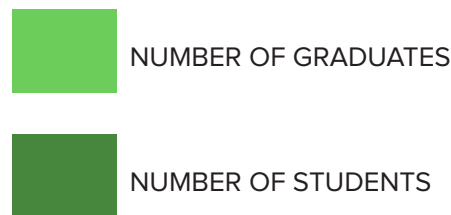
Program at a glance:

- Intensive, individualized college preparation and counseling
- College Bridge classes to prepare academically
- Matriculation assistance
- Financial planning and aid application assistance
- Scholarships to help pay for tuition and text books
- Ongoing mentorship and tutoring



Next Step graduate Nawang with College Coordinator, Jennie. Nawang will graduate from UC Davis this fall.

GROWTH OF NEXT STEP COLLEGE PROGRAM



NEXT STEP: COST EFFICIENT SOLUTIONS WITH A HEART

- The drop-out rate in Oakland hovers at 40%
- More than 65,000 Oakland adults never finished high school
- The likelihood of graduating high school remains directly linked to the neighborhood you live in and the education level of your parents

Next Step is a desperately needed solution to inequality in our city. We consistently serve those with the greatest barriers to education: They come from the poorest neighborhoods of West and East Oakland, and most will be the first in their family to complete high school and the first to go on to college.



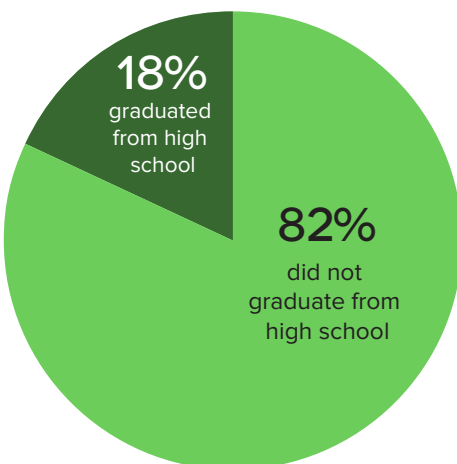
“If I didn’t come to Next Step, I probably wouldn’t be progressing toward my GED. They help me out a lot. I feel like I’m moving forward. I’m ready to go to college and do the things I want in life.”

—NAILAH, NEXT STEP STUDENT

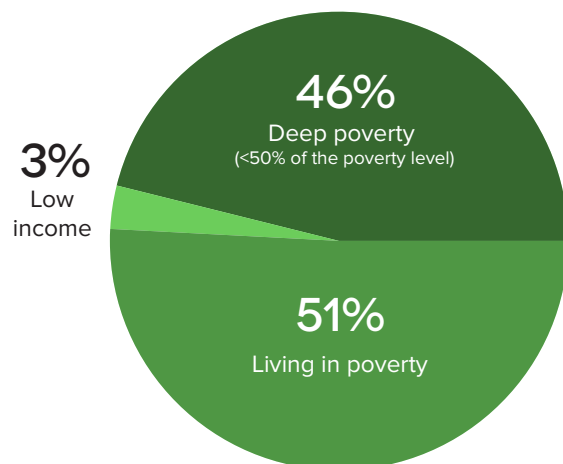
IN THE PAST YEAR

- Next Step’s graduation rate exceeded that of Oakland Unified School District (OUSD)
- Next Step had more high school graduates than either of our neighboring high schools (graduates earned a diploma or high school equivalency diploma)

EDUCATION LEVEL OF NEXT STEP STUDENTS’ PARENTS



INCOME LEVEL OF NEXT STEP STUDENTS’ FAMILIES



NEXT STEP IS GROWING!

An investment of \$39,000 will enable us to meet the following goals in the next six months:

- Grow our high school program resulting in 15 additional graduates
- Expand the college program to send 12 additional Next Step graduates on to college

Education: a return on Investment

- Reducing the number of Oakland's drop outs by half would generate \$119 million in economic benefits to the community¹
- When a parent graduates high school, they double their children's chances of completing high school²
- The incarceration rate for high school drop outs are a whopping 63 times higher than among college graduates³

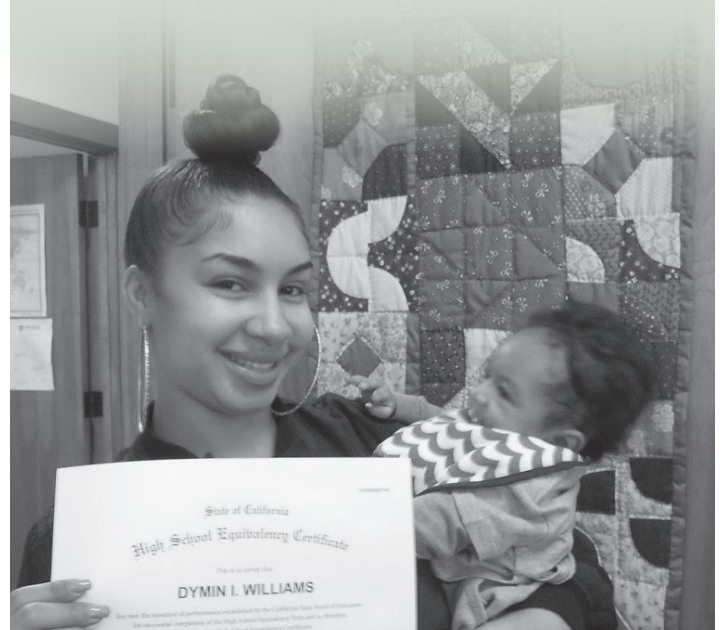
1 California Dropout Research Project, Oakland City Profile, 2015

2 Suh, S. & Suh, J. (2007). Risk factors and levels of risk for high school dropouts

3 Sum, Khatiwada, & McLaughlin, Joseph, The Consequences of Dropping Out of High School, 2012

"College is for me, but it is also for my son. I know he will have a better life because of my accomplishments."

—DYMIN, NEXT STEP STUDENT



JOIN US IN INVESTING IN A STRONGER OAKLAND

\$50 provides a senior with the text books and classroom materials they need to complete high school

\$125 pays for a student to take their high school equivalency test and graduate

\$250 will enroll a student in NSLC's College Bridge Program, with 50 hours of academic preparation, financial planning, and hands-on application assistance

\$500 will sponsor a first-generation college student in their first semester of college, including needed books, bus passes and enrollment and tuition fees.

\$1,000 will provide scholarship for low-income student to complete one-year of college, allowing a student to cover books, tuition fees and transportation.

\$1,500 will fully sponsor a Next Step graduate through their first year of college



2222 CURTIS ST.
OAKLAND, CA 94607
510-251-1731



Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage

PAID

Oakland, CA
Permit No. 1644



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.

