



NextStep

LEARNING CENTER

CHALLENGE AND ACCOMPLISHMENT: JESUS' STORY

On a stormy morning in May 2018, Jesus Rodriguez got the news he had been waiting 14 years to hear: He was a high school graduate. “Accomplishment,” said the 34 year old, “has come out of the challenge.”

Jesus arrived at Next Step Learning Center in 2004 with a lot to overcome. He wanted to find work and knew that an education was essential; however, having only elementary level reading and math skills made employment almost impossible. “I went to high school, but I did not speak English,” Jesus reflects. “I could not understand the teachers, and I could not communicate. I was alone and became demoralized. I said to myself, ‘I can’t do this,’ and went a different route—a bad one.”

Following in the footsteps of countless Next Step students, Jesus made the tremendous commitment to learning how to read, write, and do basic math. He, like so many others, had to start at the beginning, learning 12 grades’ worth of academic content while supporting himself as an adult. Jesus attributes the Next Step formula of dedication, individual tutoring, and lots of support with his success. “It took a lot of

discipline and focus. I had to listen to the tutors and let them guide me. I created good relationships with staff and have a special love for the people here.” Each year, Jesus built his skills and recently found a job. “When I started work, I told myself: ‘Be relentless—don’t stop!’ and I kept coming.”

After passing all of his high school equivalency tests, Jesus now looks forward to attending college and being eligible for a promotion at work. How does he feel about more school? “I am excited for a new challenge!” he shares. “I have what I always wanted, but it is just the passport to the next level.”



Tutor Reflections

“Jesus is the reason I enjoy tutoring at Next Step. I worked with him for MANY months helping him develop his math proficiency (an area he said is particularly challenging for him). He showed so much determination to learn and knew that advancing his education was critical to the vision he sees for his life. Jesus came to his math sessions ready to go and powered through even the most challenging areas. We developed a friendship, and I learned from him as well. In addition to helping me refresh my Spanish conversational skills, he taught me the value of never giving up!”

—JULIE, NEXT STEP TUTOR

“Jesus was one of my first students when I began volunteering at Next Step. Jesus’ journey to successfully completing his high school degree was not easy, but we traveled together over a path full of bumps, rocks, setbacks, and leaps to the destination. I would say at times we grew impatient, frustrated, and discouraged, but we managed to stick by each other to the end. Now, I look forward to his professional education and future career with pride for him and gratitude for the opportunity to work with such a determined man.”

—KATHLEEN, NEXT STEP TUTOR

SECOND CHANCES

Next Step Student Stories

LISA'S STORY

“I never thought that going back to school would be for me...I though I was past the age,” admits Lisa in the warm, sing-song accent of her native Belize. The 31 year old recent Next Step graduate is humble and unassuming. She is also a woman of feirce determination and strength.

Belize has no free education past primary school; after that, families must find the resources to pay for high school. That was not an option for Lisa. The oldest of four children, Lisa became the head of her household when her single mother died of cancer during Lisa's teens. She worked to support her siblings and send them to the schools that she herself never had the chance to attend.

Today, she lives in Oakland with her American husband and young daughter. A new arrival to the U.S., Lisa was eager to start working. “I wanted to pay my own way here and send money home to support my younger brother in school,” she explains. “But every job required a high school diploma.” Lisa came to Next Step determined to earn the diploma that her mother, who never went to high school, always wanted her to have.

“It was a combination of my dedication and your support,” she reflects after working with Next Step tutors and passing all five of her equivalency tests. “I am proud of where I am today. I took a leap of faith and believed in myself.” Lisa is currently enrolled in Next Step's College Bridge class and is looking forward to balancing work, college and motherhood. Her long-term goals? “In five year's time, I want to have a college degree and a good job. I want to keep moving up.”

Lisa (center, right) with other Next Step students discusses college-level reading in the College Bridge class.



ANTIONETTE'S STORY

Story by Krystle Hoard, Next Step Education Program Assistant

After years of feeling discouraged in the Oakland Unified School system, Antionette found herself mandated to attend an educational program. She was told to come to Next Step, but it was her who made the choice to stay. Antionette explains, “[Next Step]..was way different than high school. The high school teachers didn’t care if I did my work. At Next Step, staff and tutors actually cared about my education’”

In the days after graduation, Antionette reflects on the ways she’s changed during her twelve years of hard work at the center: “I had a lot of self doubt and low self esteem at first. I always thought it was too hard, but then I realized that I can do this! Today, I feel complete.”

Antionette beamed at her final math score print out, “I did it. It happens just when you’re about to give up.”

Looking forward, Antionette is preparing for college by joining Next Step’s College Bridge course. She is also planning to celebrate, starting with dinner with Ms. Peggy, a party and, come July, pomp and circumstance at graduation.



Antionette and Peggy, Next Step’s program director, hug in celebration upon learning Antionette’s test scores.



ABRAHAM'S STORY

Twenty-one year old Abraham is living proof that second chances are important to all of us. High school was not a time of field trips and proms for him. Instead, he says, his days were filled with “drugs, alcohol and gangs.”

Abraham rang the door at Next Step shortly after being released from prison, and we immediately saw in him the resolute calm of someone who has decided to change his life.

He recalls, “I had started reading the bible and surrendered to a higher power. Education was an important step for me in making a change.” Next Step was special, he says, because he felt welcome and at home.

Abraham completed his last high school equivalency test in April, and—armed with his new diploma—soon found full-time work with a landscaping company. “My tutor was a big help. I owe him a lot,”

says a tired Abraham stopping by the center after a long day at work. He plans on saving money, gaining on-the-job experience and applying to union apprenticeship programs.



I Know That There Is Something Inside of Me That Needs to Be Unlocked

To give us some insight into what it is like to learn to read, Next Step's reading specialist,

Karen Matza, sat down with one of her enthusiastic students, Myla, for an interview.

Can you describe the impact of having a reading disability before you came to Next Step?

My reading disability affected my life in a way that made me super fearful. It gave me high anxiety. If I found out I had to read something or write something, I totally shut down inside.

I've always felt that me not knowing how to read was going to destroy me. I felt that it was going to cost me my kids. [choking up] I feared losing my kids if someone found out. I knew I had to get my stuff together, 'cause if someone found out that dark secret it could end certain things in my life.

How has your life changed since you came back to school to address your reading disability?

It makes me feel brave. It makes me feel strong. It gives me confidence in ways that I would have never thought I'd feel confident. Coming here [to Next Step] has been a good tool for me to help my kids. My son was struggling, and I could have just thrown in the towel and said, "Look, I don't know nothing, you ain't gonna know nothing either." But I never gave up. I'm not giving up on myself [or] my son or daughter.

At first, I didn't want to share my struggles with my kids [starts to cry] because I felt like they would judge me, or they would be like, "Well, you don't know, why do we have to know?" But it hasn't been like that. I don't think they judge me at all. I think that they're proud of me. I think that they see the struggle and it makes them want to keep working hard... especially my son. Whew! He has come a long way... he made the debate team... and that's because he sees my struggle, my progress, and he know that he can make progress too. I told him "If I'm not giving up, you're not allowed to give up."

You recently started a new job. Could you have done this particular job at Hallmark before you came back to school?

No—not even. [Before] I was just applying for low skilled jobs... janitorial work, housekeeping... jobs where I didn't need to do much reading. I would get super fearful. I wouldn't even apply. I would take applications and hold on to them forever 'til I had enough courage to ask somebody...somebody who wasn't going to judge me.

Recently, I've noticed that coming to school and working on my reading has given me a lot of confidence. I had somebody come into the store the other day and ask me to help find a card for his wife. Now, I don't read out loud to nobody, but here I am reading out loud [to him]. It made my day to stand there and read that card to that man.

What has been your experience at Next Step?

Next Step is a very close-knit family—I don't think I could have achieved the stuff that I've achieved anywhere else. The program is especially for people with learning disabilities. That's what I need for my education. I've never felt comfortable in any setting, but I feel real comfortable here. It's nurturing, inviting, loving, concerned; it's not just about education, it's about your health, your wellness. It's about being a part of a community that is not going to turn on you.

What keeps you motivated?

Being able to spell and read on my own. To not have that anxiety. As much turmoil as I'm having, I'm able to walk down the street knowing that I'm doing one thing that I need to be doing and it's working. I'm proud of myself. I know there is good things gonna happen with this education: I'm gonna get my GED or high school diploma; I'm gonnna get a BA or AA, and I'm very blessed to have received the help that I'm receiving.

I judge myself, but I also know that I'm amazing. I know that there is something inside of me that needs to be unlocked. All it takes is the right people with the right keys to help me open it and discover the things that I know that I'm great at. I'm glad that I took the chance to stand on my own and fight for something that I really wanted.

Adult Literacy

More than **36 million** adults in the U.S. cannot read, write or do basic math above a 3rd grade level.

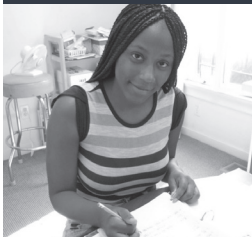
Family Literacy

Children of parents with low literacy levels have a **72%** chance of low literacy themselves



- Increasing their likelihood of
- having poor grades
- having high absentee rates
- displaying behavioral problems
- repeating school years
- dropping out

GIVE OPPORTUNITY *this* SPRING with the GIFT of LITERACY

OUR MISSION





*Literacy is
our mission*

-  Strengthening Oakland families through educational opportunities
-  Creating academic pathways out of poverty

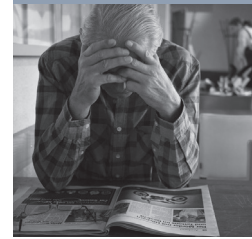
OUR SUCCESS




*Intensive,
individual
support*

-  Every year, 250 adults learn to read at Next Step
-  83% of Next Step students achieving functional literacy increased their income

OUR PROMISE




*The power
of literacy
in every
home*



-  Everyone who comes to Next Step will be given the opportunity to read

Give now and double your gift!

Help us reach our goal of raising \$125,000 for literacy programs this school year.

-  We are 90% there! With \$113,000 already raised this school year, we need your help to raise the remaining \$12,000.

Next Step board members have promised to match every donation given between now and June 30th up to \$6,000.

-  \$500 provides one year of individual tutoring and the one-on-one reading intervention
-  \$125,000 annually guarantees 250 low-income students weekly tutoring and specialized reading intervention at Next Step

(Sources for the statistics listed below can be found at www.nextsteplc.org)

Unemployment

Low literacy costs the U.S.

\$225 million

or more each year in non-productivity in the workforce, crime, and loss of tax revenue due to unemployment.

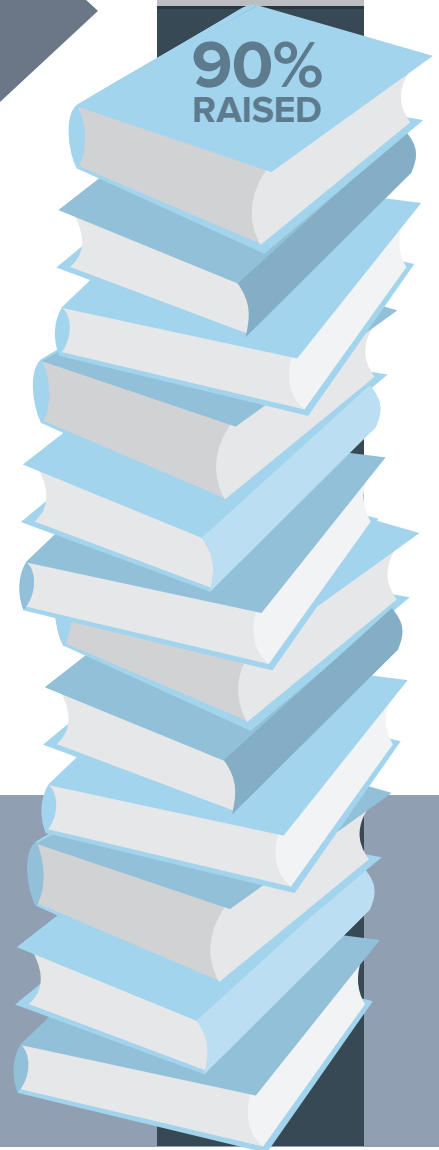
Poverty

43%

of adults with the lowest literacy live in poverty.

**ONLY
\$12,000
TO GO**

**90%
RAISED**



COLLEGE OPENS

“As a father it is important to demonstrate the value of education”

NATHANIEL’S STORY

By Jennie Emard, Next Step College Program Coordinator

Nathaniel was always a creative person. He is a talented, self-taught artist who makes his own music and dreams of having a successful production company. Unfortunately, creativity and talent didn’t translate into strong academic performance in schools, where disabilities resulting from premature birth caused him to struggle from kindergarten on. Nathaniel was told he was “slow” and “retarded” and recalls a day in elementary school when his entire class chased him home. It’s no wonder Nathaniel stopped attending schools that didn’t celebrate differences and didn’t help him build the learning skills he needed to succeed.



Despite dropping out, Nathaniel witnessed his single mother work, raise her children, and earn a doctorate degree. Witnessing his mother’s determination, Nathaniel decided anything was possible. He enrolled at NSLC in 2012, writing on his enrollment form that his goal was to become a music engineer. After working hard with tutors, Nathaniel earned his G.E.D, but he knew this was not enough to achieve his goal. With the support of the Next Step college program, Nathaniel enrolled at Laney College to pursue an Associate’s degree in Production for Video, Broadcast and Digital Cinematography. Since enrolling in 2014, Nathaniel has earned a Certificate of Proficiency in Audio Production and is set to graduate this may with his Associate degree as an Academic Honor student.

To achieve this, Nathaniel dug deep inside himself to overcome challenges in his general education courses and continue school after the loss of his father in 2016. He had to repeat one math classes four times, but worked with his Next Step tutor to persist and pass. His success is a reminder of the importance and value of the support provided to students at Next Step. The belief in people’s ability to change and appropriate academic support goes a long way to allow students to realize their dreams and achieve the qualifications to work in the field of their passion.

Nathaniel has worked with the Lower Bottom Players theatre group for approximately 15 years, on a volunteer basis at times when money was short. He plans to continue his contributions to the theatre group, but with a degree in hand can pursue regular work in the industry and open more doors for his own business. In the future, he can apply his completed courses toward a Bachelor’s degree but after years of hard work is excited to aggressively pursue positions with local companies this summer.

Nathaniel expressed recently that his upcoming graduation seems unreal after his past experiences in school, “As a father of an eighteen year old son it is important to demonstrate the value of education. I stayed committed to finish, which shows him he can, too.”

(Sources for the statistics listed below can be found at www.nextsteplc.org)

Income Disparity

less than

50%

of low-income graduates go on to college

Graduation Inequity

African American college students are

25%

less likely to graduate than their white or Asian classmates

NEW DOORS

A Way Out of the Struggle

AUDRA'S STORY

By Jennie Emard, Next Step College Program Coordinator

Audra relocated to Oakland from a small mountain town in Northern California after her parents divorced in her eighth grade year. Struggling with culture shock and isolation, she was overwhelmed when financial instability from the recession resulted in her family's eviction. She lived on her own and worked, but stopped attending school.

Facing adulthood with no diploma, Audra enrolled at Next Step where she saw other students entering college and set her sights on a Bachelor's degree. After receiving her G.E.D. in 2010, Audra enrolled at Laney College. Placed in remedial courses due to never attending high school, the added length of her program was daunting. But she never considered stopping, even when she gave birth a year into her college program and became a single mother.

After new success in math and science classes, Audra chose Chemical Engineering as her major. She completed nine mathematics courses in addition to major and elective courses to be eligible to transfer to a four-year school. Buckling down with supplemental tutoring at Next Step, Audra quickly became an academic honor student and earned a position as a teaching assistant in the chemistry department.

Six years after enrolling at Laney, Audra is graduating this May with an A.S. in Mathematics, an A.S. in Science and a Certificate of Achievement in IGETC transfer requirements. Next Step is proud to announce that Audra has been accepted to all six of the 4-year colleges she applied to, including UC Berkeley and UCLA—she has some big decisions to make! Audra was just named valedictorian of her graduating class at Laney College!

She hopes to use her future BA in Chemical Engineering to improve equitable access to clean water, air and healthy sustainable food in our communities. She is motivated to protect those resources for her daughter's generation and others to follow.

When asked how she might see her daughter's future as different because she achieved a secondary degree, Audra says:

Growing up money was always tight. Neither of my parents graduated from college and they both still struggle financially today. I was destined for the same path as my parents until I realized there was a way out of this struggle. Through obtaining a college degree I will be able to reverse this trend and provide my daughter with a life every child deserves—a life that includes the basic necessities like a stable place to live, clothes, and food along with luxuries like piano lessons and summer camps.

Congratulations, Audra, from all of us at Next Step. We look forward to supporting you as a first generation college student at a premier university and beyond.



Economy

By 2020, an estimated

68%

of all jobs will require a bachelor's or associate's degree or college certificate

Community Benefit

Compared to high school graduates, bachelor's degree holders receive \$32,000 less in government spending and pay \$273,000 more in taxes which amounts to a

\$305,000

 net benefit to government.



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**NEXT STEP
CLASS OF 2018
GRADUATION**

**Sacred Heart Church
Oakland**

*Natavia and Journey, recent
Next Step graduates, celebrate
their accomplishment.*

