



Second Chances Essential for Success

At age 16 and in the eighth grade at Woodrow Wilson Jr. High School in Southwest Detroit, Marisol Warunek decided that she had had enough of school.

The years of struggling with school work and being the target of bullies had taken their toll.

“My teachers cared but didn’t always have the resources to help their students,” she said.

It got to the point where she was “never going to school.” She said she was then told that she had to make a decision to either start attending school regularly or drop out. She chose to drop out.

“It was not the best decision,” she said.

The circumstances that led to that moment, and the steps that were later taken to reverse its impact, will be a common theme among the speakers attending the Feb. 15 FamilySpeak event at the state Capitol. This opportunity is being hosted by Lansing-based policy advocacy group Michigan’s Children along with the Michigan Association of Community and Adult Education to put a human face on the issue of leaving high school before completion and illustrate the need for alternative and adult education options that can help.

“Many factors influence educational success.” said Michele Corey, Vice President for Programs at Michigan’s Children. “Our systems need to better work around those barriers the first time, and make sure that 2nd and 3rd opportunities are available. Michigan’s economy, and Michigan families need everyone to succeed with a high school credential and beyond.”

Marisol, who as a single mom at age 35 found herself without a job, decided to go back to school and get her GED. “I was really afraid of the tests for a long time, and I was kind of ashamed for a long time that I was 35 and didn’t have an education, or at least a high school diploma,” she said. She enrolled in the program at Washtenaw Community College (WCC) and successfully completed her GED in short order, with honors.

She said the support she received from the staff at WCC made the difference for her. “I had all these people behind me saying ‘you can do this’. That experience enabled me to have the confidence to know that I could really do anything.”

And her education didn’t stop there. After she received her GED, she went on to college at WCC, where she graduated with an associate degree in liberal arts and is pursuing a three-plus-one business degree with Eastern Michigan University.

She also has found work. The student mentoring she did while at WCC led to a job in the college counseling department. She now is Administrative Assistant, Adult Transitions Pathway at WCC.

“I’m glad to be here to be able to be (the students’) cheerleader ... to help support them to finish their GED and move on to their next step, like I did.”

And what does her son, Owen, now a junior at Pinckney High School, think about all this?

“He is proud of me for going back and conquering my fears. When he struggles, he thinks about the fact that I didn’t give up.”

The Michigan Association of Community and Adult Education works to provide a cohesive framework for community education through collaboration and guidance at the local, state and federal level. MACAE’s vision is to engage in partnerships, provide member support and advocate for lifelong learning, leading to employment and self-sufficient families.

Michigan’s Children is the only statewide independent voice working to ensure that policymakers prioritize the needs of the most challenged children from cradle to career and their families – children of color, children from low-income families, and children shouldering other challenging circumstances.

FamilySpeak, modeled after Michigan’s Children’s signature KidSpeak® forums, mimics a traditional legislative committee hearing. These forums have been facilitated since 1996. Connecting the experiences of families directly with policymakers has provided firsthand knowledge of the challenges and opportunities and has proven to be an effective advocacy strategy. Their voices have changed the trajectory of policy conversation and have resulted in additional champions for parent-driven solutions in the Legislature, several Departments and other local policymaking bodies.

For more information about this FamilySpeak or other opportunities to hear directly from young people or their families, please contact Michele Corey, Vice President for Programs, michele@michiganschildren.org.