

Brandie will attend Western Carolina University in the fall, where she plans to double major in birth through kindergarten and communications disorders. She graduated last week with an associate's degree in early childhood education.

Here is her story, in her own words (note: edited for length and clarity):

Growing up education wasn't something that was stressed as important in my family. My family believed in work and that was it. When I dropped out of high school my senior year it never occurred to me that it was a bad decision. Fast forward many years later and I began to realize just how important having an education really was. I wanted a career, not just a job. I started by completing my high school diploma.

I have always loved working with children and thought that would be a great career to have. In January 2015, I decided to call and get more information about the Early Childhood Education (ECE) program that was offered through South Piedmont Community College. I will never forget my conversation that day with Carilyn Raymond. She explained the program options and allowed me to ask questions.

There was never any doubt that she believed that I would go far. I thought that I would just take a class here and there and that would be it. By the time I left her office, I knew exactly what I wanted to do. I wanted to immerse myself in the ECE program and graduate with honors.

I began taking classes and learning so much more than I had ever anticipated. I participated in the events that were offered each semester by the ECE staff, as well as the Creating the Future Conference. I started a work study position in the SSRC and grew my knowledge of ECE even more. After my year of work study was complete I was able to get a job working in my field. While doing this I was able to take classes through Education Stars. The Education Stars program allowed me to work while taking classes and they were also provided to me for no cost. The program even covered the cost of the books.

I graduated with a 4.0 GPA, wearing cords from Phi Theta Kappa and The National Society of Leadership and Success. I recently started the job that I had always hoped that I would get when I started this journey and am currently a full time EC Teacher Assistant with Union County Public Schools.

I want everyone to know that if it had not been for the staff in the education department at SPCC, I would have never made it this far. They were always encouraging me to work hard and dream big. Words cannot express my gratitude for all that they have done and continue to do for their students. That one phone call has changed my life. The encouragement that I have received has made me work hard to achieve my goals, but has also allowed my children to see what can be done with a little hard work and a lot of motivation.

*Ed Stars is funded by Alliance for Children and implemented through South Piedmont Community College.*