

## **Leah Ellis, New Mexico**

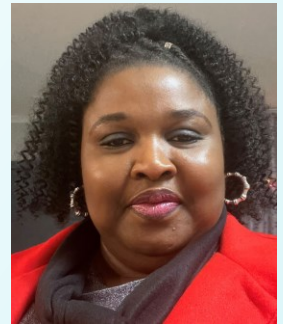
My high school experience ended abruptly in October of my freshman year. At 15, I was told I 'didn't serve them' because I wouldn't graduate on time. I wasn't disruptive, but I was overlooked. No one, not teachers, counselors, or even family, asked why I was failing. I was simply expelled. That silence was a profound collapse. In 2022, I took a leap of faith and enrolled in Next Steps Adult Education at UNM-Valencia. There, I discovered a passion for learning and a healing I desperately needed. It was challenging, especially navigating math, but my instructors' unwavering support carried me through. Two years later, I graduated. Today, I'm a college student pursuing psychology and political science, a dedicated state advocacy representative, and a social media content creator. As a mother, stepmother, and grandmother, I'm rebuilding my life. Adult education has been fundamental, a gift I gave myself that no one can ever diminish.



## **Abimbola Ogurinde, Indiana**

My name is Abimbola Ogunrinde, a Treasurer, Paraprofessional, and a Student Ambassador Trainer at our local level.

I'm a wife, mom of twin daughters and a son. Having a son that struggle in his early part of his life to suddenly change to becoming a better version of himself through the help of some beautiful educators has encouraged me to aspire to learn more and help those I come in contact with that are struggling as a child or an adult with the best of my ability and if it's more than I can handle I always introduce such fellow to more resources that can help them further in life.



## **Zahra Alrekabi, Texas**

My name is Zahra Alrekabi and I am from Dallas, Texas. I am a proud GED graduate. Before enrolling in a GED class, I had never heard of the GED. I had just returned to the United States after living in Iraq for 8 years, and I dreamed of the American high school experience, but I was not eligible to enroll. However, my GED gave me opportunities that I could not gain otherwise. I won the 2023 Texas Workforce Commission, which allowed me to go to Austin, Texas for the first time, which gave me the confidence to apply to universities far from home. I currently work at Workforce Solutions Greater Dallas, whose program helped me obtain my GED. Working there felt like a full circle moment, and it is the one of the most fulfilling jobs I could ever ask for. I am also a community college student at Tarrant County College, earning my Associate's Degree of Science by spring and then transferring to university by the fall. I have made so many friends along my journey, and my GED allowed me to believe I am always able to attain my biggest dreams

