



By Michelle Espinoza

I am a graduate of the St. Mary's GED Program.

I didn't finish high school. I got married young, and soon after, I became pregnant. I stepped into being a wife and a mother before I had finished my own education. Life moved quickly, and I poured myself into my family. Education wasn't something I felt urgency about at the time — I told myself I would get back to it eventually.

But as our family grew, especially after my second and third child were born, something began to shift in me. I started thinking about the example I was setting. I didn't just want to tell my children that education mattered — I wanted to show them. I wanted them to see that finishing what you start is important, even if it takes longer than you expected.

So I began seriously looking for a way to go back.

Why didn't I do it sooner? It wasn't that I didn't value education, and it wasn't that I doubted myself. I knew I was capable. I had support and encouragement at home. I may have felt a few normal nerves about stepping into a classroom again, but the truth is, the only real obstacle standing in my way was childcare.

As a mom, you can't just decide to pursue your education and walk out the door. You have to know your child is safe. You have to know they're cared for. You have to know you're not choosing your future at the expense of your family.

And that's where St. Mary's changed everything for me.

When I found the St. Mary's GED Program, I didn't just find classes — I found people who believed in me. My teacher, Virginia Sheffield, believed in me and encouraged me every step of the way. She saw potential in me and reminded me that I was capable of more. That kind of encouragement stays with you.

And then there was the nursery. Beverley and Betsy cared for my youngest daughter while I was in class. They didn't just watch her — they loved her. They made it

possible for me to sit in that classroom without worry. Because of them, I could focus. I could learn. I could grow.

They didn't just make room for me as a student — they made room for me as a mother.

There were still long days. Coordinating childcare, showing up consistently, and managing life with four children took commitment. But every time I walked into that building, I knew I was exactly where I needed to be.

And then, I graduated.

That moment wasn't just about passing a test. It was about finishing something that had been incomplete for years. It was about keeping a promise to myself. And it was about letting my children watch me accomplish something that once felt out of reach.

Because of that foundation, I was able to go to college. I earned my EMT license, and I am currently working toward becoming a paramedic. Right now, my focus is on my education and continuing to grow.

And one of the most meaningful full-circle moments in my journey is this: I was given the opportunity to work in the very same nursery at St. Mary's where my daughter was cared for while I was in class.

The same place that made it possible for me to study... I now get to serve in. The same space that supported my child... I now get to support other children.

That is what this program does.

It doesn't just help someone earn a diploma. It strengthens families. It removes barriers. It creates opportunities that ripple outward — into homes, into careers, and into the next generation.

St. Mary's didn't just help me pass a test. It helped me step into a future I had hoped for but hadn't yet reached.

Today, I stand here as a mother of four. A college student. A licensed EMT continuing my education. And someone who knows firsthand what this program makes possible.

When you support St. Mary's GED Program, you are not just funding books or classroom space. You are removing the one obstacle that may be standing between a parent and their future. You are giving someone the ability to better their life without sacrificing their family.

There is someone sitting at home right now who wants to take that step — who just needs the opportunity and support to do it.

I am standing here as proof that when you invest in programs like this, lives truly change.

Thank you for believing in education.

Thank you for believing in families.

And thank you for making stories like mine possible.