

Adult Education Connection  
By Karen Gent



How does one go from needing to earn a GED to teaching a GED preparation class? That's the journey one lady from Castlewood, Virginia has taken. You can find Nellie Bryant in a classroom teaching others what they need to know to pass the GED tests.

Nellie was the baby of seven children. All six of her siblings were high school graduates. Nellie grew up in Russell County and attended Castlewood High School. When she was in the tenth grade, her parents decided to move to Wise County. The thought of changing schools was overwhelming to Nellie at the time, so she informed her parents that she was dropping out of school. Nellie says that her mother was heart-broken, but her father felt that the "baby" of the family could do whatever she wanted to do; therefore, he supported her decision.

Some time later, Nellie married a man from Russell County and moved back to Castlewood. She says that it always bothered her that she hadn't finished high school, but it really bothered her after the birth of her two children. When her children were ages five and six, she decided to earn her GED. She felt that she might need to have her high school credential in the future, and she wanted to set a good example for her children.

Nellie first decided she would try an adult education class that was being offered in Castlewood. She attended one class session and found that it was more of a literacy class at the time. She then decided to just go and take the GED Tests. She relates that she "prayed fervently" about taking the tests, and ended up passing all of them after the first attempt. She says that she found the math and science tests to be quite a challenge, but she was successful at passing them.

When both her son and daughter started school, Nellie got a job at the cannery in her community. Shortly after that, she took a job with Head Start as a cook. When an opening became available for a home base teacher, Nellie applied for the position and got the job. This position required a CDA (Child Development Associate) credential which she was able to obtain from Head Start in Philadelphia. She worked in this position for two years. At that time, her husband had to go on disability, so she really needed to work for financial reasons.

After holding this position for two years, Nellie went to work for Wise County Head Start as a home visitor. All the while, she took college classes through Southwest Virginia Community College, Virginia Intermont College, and Madison University. In 2002, she completed a Bachelor's Degree in Early Childhood Development.

Getting her GED and college education was a long process that took years to complete, but the rewards were great. Nellie and her daughter graduated from college the same year. Nellie says, "I would encourage anyone who doesn't have a high school diploma to get a GED because it is so important. It is a requirement in the workplace and for self-satisfaction."

Since August 2005, Nellie has worked with Even Start as an adult education instructor at Copper Creek Elementary School. There she teaches a GED preparation class for the parents of those children enrolled in the Even Start program. Nellie expresses that she finds her work very rewarding. She says, "You don't know how rewarding it is until you see someone accomplish his or her goal of earning a GED. Helping others achieve their goals adds to your own list of accomplishments." Nellie Bryant has discovered that seeing her students succeed brings the same rewarding feeling to her as seeing her own children succeed in life.

If you or someone you know didn't finish high school, contact Southwest Regional Adult Education at 889-5424 or 1-866-581-9935 to find out how you can successfully prepare to earn your GED.