

# SUNSHINE **SUCCESS** STORIES

*Showcasing Florida's Adult Education Students*



**Belinda Howell**  
Region 1



**Tevor Leininger**  
Region 1



**Felicia Watson**  
Region 2



**Gloria Ivines**  
Region 2



**Erick Vasquez**  
Region 3



**Michael Harding**  
Region 3



**Benjamin Wiggins**  
Region 3



**Clara George**  
Region 4



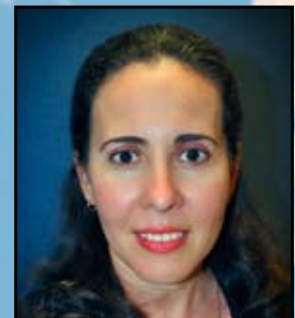
**Mackenly Abraham**  
Region 4



**Magda Ereira**  
Region 5



**Verlin Silencieux**  
Region 5



**Yanami Ferrer**  
Region 5

Adult education and career, technical and workforce education serve over 300,000 students in Florida through a dual delivery system of K-12 public school districts and community/state colleges. Correctional institutions, libraries, community and faith based organizations also serve adult students. The Sunshine Success Stories identifies learners who have reached their life goals as a result of their participation in the adult education system and are now active in their communities.

The purpose of the Sunshine Success Stories is to:

- Showcase the triumphs of students who participated in adult education/workforce education programs;
- Demonstrate the results of integrated academics – adult education to career and technical programs to community/state colleges;
- Increase awareness of adult education and career and technical education statewide; and
- Illustrate the impact of these programs on an individual's and state's economic growth.

On the following pages, you will read success stories from around the state that illustrate how adult education has impacted the lives of so many. For every one story you read, there are dozens more that echo the successes of adult education students in Florida.

Thank you to the twelve adult education students featured in this magazine, who shared their stories of hardships, challenges and successes. They proudly represent the thousands of adult education students, who are given a second chance to gain self-esteem, a sense of personal and civic responsibility, obtain higher wages, which translates to a more productive workforce for Florida. These adult education students are truly inspiring. Congratulations to the 2010 Sunshine Success Story winners.

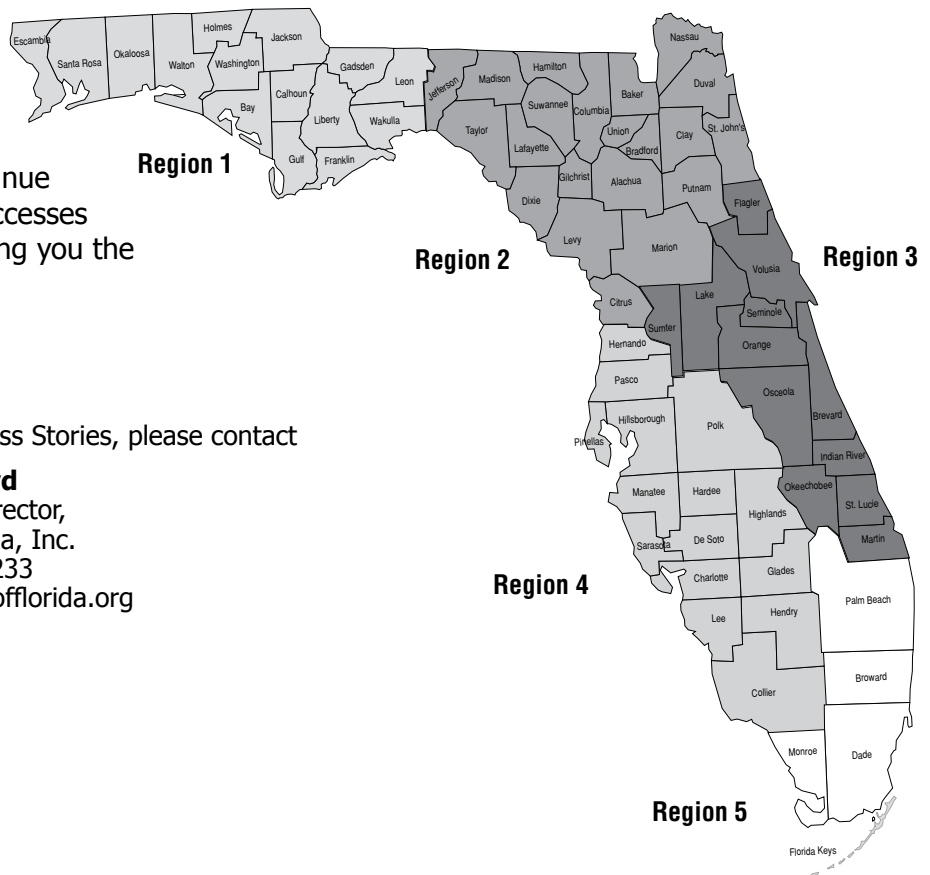
ACE of Florida would like to thank those individuals who took the time to nominate and share their student success stories. We encourage you to use this publication to help promote your adult education programs and continue sharing your adult education student successes in Florida. ACE of Florida is proud to bring you the following Sunshine Success Stories.

The Sunshine Success Stories are sponsored by ACE of Florida, Inc.

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## Region 1 - Washington County

# Belinda Howell

**School District, State College or Community-Based Organization:**  
Washington County School District

**Program/Level Class Enrolled in:**  
Adult Education & Patient Care Technician

**Years of Attendance:** 2009-2010

**Goals met by the nominee:**  
High School diploma, gold seal certificate

**Why this student deserves recognition:**  
Belinda exemplifies adult education success.

**Nominated By:** Cathy York, RN, BSN, PatientCare Technician Instructor, Washington County School District

Belinda Howell quit school in the seventh grade, married, had children, and went to work. Her lifetime goal, however, was to get her high school diploma. Belinda said, "I tried to get my high school diploma so many times but I was not born smart like other people. I would just end up feeling bad, thinking I was not smart enough, and I would quit. I guess my heart just was not in it."

Belinda attempted the GED in 1995, but was unsuccessful. She did not give up. She started the Washington-Holmes Technical Center (WHTC) Adult Education Night Program. She worked hard and was within 25 points of achieving her diploma when the state requirements for a GED were changed and she had to start over.

Belinda worked full time at a local factory for 15 years. She recalls the day in 2009 when West-Point Stevens asked for people to volunteer to leave. When she agreed to do so one of her fellow workers asked, "What are you going to do? You do not even have your high school diploma." Belinda told her not to worry that she was working on that. Belinda had started working every week with a tutor and enrolled in the Adult Education day program at WHTC.

Belinda saw this as an opportunity to continue her education. She worked very hard and successfully passed the GED. Determined to enter the LPN program, she set out to achieve the required 12.9 on the TABE tests. Initially, her scores fell in the range of the ABE Intermediate Literacy Level, she did not give up. Belinda enrolled in the Patient Care Technician program half-time and continued in the Adult Education program. On November 24, 2009, Belinda had the required 12.9 in all areas of the TABE tests. In 2010, with tears streaming, Belinda graduated with her high school diploma and a gold seal certificate from the Patient Care Technician Program. She was recognized as the Outstanding Student of the Year.

The Adult Education staff was impressed with her sheer perseverance and determination. Belinda took the math portion of the GED six times over a period of 5 years until she was successful. Belinda has such a sweet nature and positive attitude, giving up is not in her. She was willing to do whatever it took to get the scores she needed. Belinda's confidence came from the belief that she could learn, be successful, and achieve her goals.

Over the past two winters, Belinda helped distribute more than 100 blankets to the homeless – no one was turned away. Once there was a man in stage 4 of cancer who needed to return to his home in Louisiana. Belinda facilitated his return and took him to the bus station. She shares her faith with her community through her outreach street ministry. In addition to this, she is actively involved in prison ministry.

Belinda exemplifies adult education success. With a renewed self-confidence, she is scheduled to start the Hemodialysis Technician Program.

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*"I know my heart was in it this time."*

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## Region 1 - Leon County

# Trevor Leininger

**School District, State College or Community-Based Organization:**  
Leon County School District

**Program/Level Class Enrolled in:**  
High School Credit/Adult Education

**Years of Attendance:** 2009-2010

**Goals met by the nominee:** Trevor was able to overcome significant personal challenges to complete the work for his high school diploma. He did so while also completing credits at the local community college. His grades were such that he has earned two scholarships and has begun his work at FSU!

**Why this student deserves recognition:** Like all of us, Trevor made some poor choices. He struggled to get his diploma. His story deserves recognition because Trevor, with great family support, found an alternate route to his goal, through ACE, and has succeeded exceptionally.

**Nominated by:** Anne Parker, Guidance Counselor, Leon County School District

Trevor Leininger sounds like the definition of a successful high school graduate. He moves into a residence hall at Florida State this week. His GPA as a senior was close to 4.0. This past summer he took two classes at FSU to get a jump on his college career. He was selected for a Bright Futures scholarship and was recently awarded a Robert C. Byrd Scholarship which honors exceptional graduates. In his spare time, Trevor works at the Florida Supreme Court. The story sounds just about perfect.

His story is fantastic but his road has not always been smooth. Trevor withdrew from a private school in Tallahassee, his senior year, after attending there since kindergarten. He has said he withdrew rather than be kicked out. He was ready to get out of a traditional high school. In addition, he felt the need to move away from home and did so, after turning 18.

Fortunately, Trevor found his way to Adult & Community Education in Tallahassee. There he entered the AE Program which works exclusively with students trying to earn the necessary credits for a traditional high school diploma. These students are not co-enrolled in a local high school. Trevor worked very hard and succeeded. He also attended a local community college to earn some of those needed credits. He proudly walked across the stage at ACE's May graduation ceremony. In spite of setbacks and challenges, he had achieved his goal. He had done the very thing ACE educators dream of for their students.

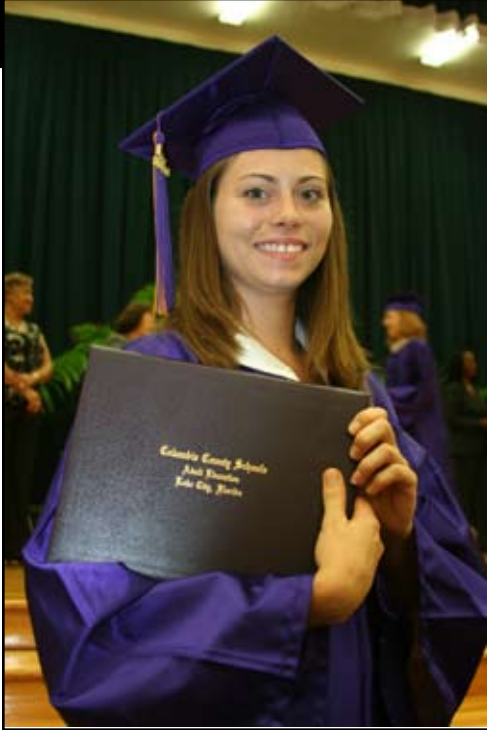
Trevor deserves recognition for several reasons. He persevered and met his goals even though he was quite disappointed with education in general and with other parts of his life. He has re-examined some of those areas of concern and has a new understanding and appreciation. Most of all, Trevor managed to keep himself on track and has come out of a rough period, having exceeded all expectations. His family and the ACE staff are very proud of him!

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*“The ACE program gave me structure in my life when I needed it and helped me see the possibilities of my future.”*

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## Region 2 - Columbia County



# Felicia Watson

**School District, State College or Community-Based Organization:** Columbia County School District Career and Adult Education

**Program/Level Class Enrolled in:** GED/Even Start Family Literacy

**Years of Attendance:** 2009

**Goals met by the nominee:** Felicia earned her GED during the early fall of 2009. She procured employment with the Columbia County School District and began attending college at Florida Gateway College this fall.

**Why this student deserves recognition:** Felicia has overcome many obstacles to return to school and continue her education. She is self-driven and successfully meets goals that she sets for herself.

**Nominated by:** Mary Keen, Career and Adult Coordinator, Columbia County School District Career and Adult Education

Felicia, a single parent of two, enrolled in Adult Education in August of 2009. In her words, it was very difficult for her to get back on track after being out of school for six years, but she knew that her education was paramount in better supporting her family. Felicia also participated in the Even Start Family Literacy Program, as she wanted to supply her children with the best education possible to help them excel.

Felicia is highly respected by her peers and instructors for her honesty, integrity and dependability, and as a result, was selected as a recipient of our program's "Outstanding Student Achievement" award in September of 2009. Due to her determination and perseverance, she earned her GED during the early fall of 2009 and was recognized at graduation for high honors in mathematics. As a result of her diligence and strong work ethic, she was hired as a clerk with our Adult Education Program shortly after earning her GED. She continues to participate in our Project NET (Need to Expedite Transition) program and as a result, earned advanced college credit for "Student Success" prior to enrolling in Florida Gateway College this fall. She continues to work for our program part-time and attends Florida Gateway College full-time in pursuit of an elementary education degree. She serves as a valuable resource and role model for our adult education students aspiring to greater success. We are so proud of her and all of her accomplishments!

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*"I just want all who think that there is no hope for them to finish their education, there is always hope and the people in adult education care and will help you with anything that they can."*

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## Region 2 - Alachua County



# Gloria Ivines

**School District, State College or Community-Based Organization:**  
Alachua County

**Program/Level Class Enrolled in:** Adult High School

**Years of Attendance:** one

**Goals met by nominee:** Earned a bachelor's and a master's degree in education; certified in Administration of Adult Ed, ESE, and math (5-9); and an adult educator for 17 years.

**Why this student deserves recognition:** Gloria was a teenage parent and a high school dropout. She earned her diploma, completed college, and has devoted her career to promoting literacy and life-long learning.

**Nominated by:** Dr. Dangbe Sua, Education Supervisor I, Florida Department of Corrections, Charlotte Correctional Institute

Gloria Ivines dropped out of high school when she was seventeen. Five years and two children later, she felt compelled to earn her diploma in order to provide a good example for her daughters. She enrolled in the adult education program in Gainesville and soon graduated from high school. The speaker at her graduation was a former adult education graduate who was attending college. Inspired by the speaker, Gloria began working on her AA degree. Juggling a young family, working full-time, and taking classes was not easy. It took her eight years, but she finally earned her AA degree.

Gloria went on to earn her bachelor's and master's degrees in education. Never forgetting the speaker who inspired her, Gloria called the Lofton Center and volunteered to speak at graduation. The principal accepted her offer to be the keynote speaker at graduation and asked her to interview for a part-time teaching position as an ABE/GED teacher.

That interview was the beginning of Gloria Ivines' career as an adult educator. She was soon offered a full-time teaching position at the Lofton Center teaching ABE, GED, and workplace literacy classes. When the adult education teacher at the Alachua County Jail retired, Gloria asked to be transferred to the jail. During the seven years she taught at the jail, she helped over three hundred inmates pass the GED exam, and she worked with local judges to start an early release program for inmates who earned a GED while incarcerated.

Because she knows the obstacles many adult learners face, Gloria didn't hesitate to tell her students how she struggled to earn her high school diploma and finish college, which made her an excellent role model for her students. It was not uncommon for her to volunteer to help tutor students before and after school and on weekends. She also volunteered to provide workshops for nurses who worked with adults with poor literacy skills.

When her youngest daughter wanted to drop out of high school, Gloria refused to give up. She diligently followed her progress, and provided encouragement and support. It took her daughter an extra year but she finally graduated.

Gloria is currently a placement and transition specialist for the Florida Department of Corrections and her goal is to become an education supervisor. She is a member of ACE, the Correctional Educators Association and the Florida Literacy Coalition. She has been invited to present at ACE and the Florida Literacy Coalition conferences and the Department of Correction's statewide training. For the last two years, she has served on the Division of Career and Adult Education Professional Development Committee, and she and her coworkers recently submitted a proposal to give a presentation at the 2010 ACE conference.

Gloria is a very successful former adult education student who has volunteered her time and devoted her career to advancing adult literacy. She continues to be a strong role model for her students and her children, and plans to continue contributing to the field of adult education.

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*“Learning is a life-long endeavor. It is never too late to start the journey.”*

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## Region 3 - Seminole County

# Erick Vasquez

**Organization:** Seminole State College of Florida

**Program/Level Class Enrolled in:** Low Intermediate, High, Advanced

**Years of attendance:** one

**Goals met by the nominee:** Erick was able to learn English and get actively involved in the community. He now has a promising career working at McDonald's.

**Why this student deserves recognition:** Erick left his country and family for a better future. He broke the language barrier, endured hardship and became a leader in his community and profession.

**Nominated by:** Ed Rivadeneyra, ELS Resource Specialist, Seminole State College of Florida

When Erick Vasquez left Venezuela and came to the United States with his sister in 2002, he had countless dreams, aspirations and goals. He wanted so much to improve his life, help his sister reach her goals and assist his family in his native country. As he interacted with others in the community, he realized that in order to achieve those dreams, he first needed to conquer the language barrier.

Erick joined the ESOL Program at Seminole State College of Florida in the summer of 2003 at the Low Intermediate level. During this time, Erick was a responsible and determined student, avidly studying and preparing himself in order to make the most out of his stay in the program.

Unfortunately, Erick had his share of hardship. During the first year, Erick suddenly found himself living the tragic loss of his sister in a car accident. Getting through his emotional pain while struggling through legal procedures and funeral arrangements back in his home country was more than a challenge...it seemed impossible. However, after taking some time out for himself, Erick returned to the ESOL program. He remained focused and more determined than ever to make it.

Eventually, Erick got a job at McDonald's as a crew member, and in less than a year, while he was studying in the Advanced level, he was promoted to Swing Manager. Because of his determination and hard work, Erick is currently the restaurant manager at the worldwide location near Disney World. He provides training and support to up and coming supervisors, and he is also being coached to become a regional manager.

Erick is now married and also helps support his family in Venezuela. Thanks to the ESOL program at Seminole State College, Erick was able to gain the language skills he needed to put his many talents to work and become a productive and excelling member of our community. Erick Vasquez exemplifies the values this country stands for and proudly represents the difference ESOL programs across the United States make in the life of immigrants.

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*“One day a friend of mine told me that he wanted to be as lucky as I am. I said to him that I have always gone after the things I want in life.”*

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## Region 3 - St. Lucie County

# Michael Harding

**School District, State College or Community-Based Organization:**  
Indian River State College

**Program/Level Class Enrolled in:**  
Adult Education and Associate in Science Degree programs

**Years of attendance:** three years

**Goals met by nominee:**  
He finished his high school requirements, transitioned into a postsecondary program, earned his Associate in Science degree including the completion of the Police Academy and has begun his career as a police officer.

**Why this student deserves recognition:** Harding's story is representative of some 340,000 reasons that adult education programs need to be continued in the state of Florida.

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**Nominated by:** Dr. Anthony Iacono, Associate Dean of Developmental Education, Indian River State College

Although he is only 22 years old, Michael Harding has already found his pathway, completed his high school education, made the transition into postsecondary education and graduated, and has begun his career. He is one of our most impressive recent Indian River State College Adult Education graduates, and his story deserves to be told.

Losing his father shortly before he was born in Hollywood, Florida, Michael grew up as an only child in a single parent household with the support of his maternal grandfather who became the father figure in his life. He attended several elementary and middle magnet schools in south Florida prior to his family's northward relocation to Port St. Lucie. This move was prompted by the terminal condition of his grandfather who soon afterward succumbed to pancreatic cancer.

Transferring to a new high school in a different area as a junior was overwhelming for Michael. The one class that he especially enjoyed was law studies. However, this particular class alone could not sustain Michael's interest long enough for him to complete his education at this traditional high school. He dropped out. After becoming bored with watching television and playing video games, Michael made the decision to enter the Adult Education program at Indian River State College. Following a great deal of hard work and preparation, Michael completed his high school education during the summer of 2006.

With the assistance of a facilitator, Michael was able to determine his long-term interests and focus on a career. His childhood desire to become a police officer, the influence of various family members who were involved in law enforcement and the spark that was ignited by the law studies class in a local high school combined to motivate Michael to enter the two-year law enforcement track program which enabled him to earn an Associate of Science degree with a major in criminal justice and complete the police academy. During the six month academy phase, Michael met a local police officer who allowed him to do several civilian ride-alongs during which he was afforded the opportunity to see first-hand what a police officer does on a daily basis.

Michael completed his Associate of Science degree as well as the police academy, passed the state of Florida Law Enforcement examination, became certified to be a law enforcement officer anywhere in the state, and was hired by the Fort Pierce Police Department in 2008. He is still employed there as a road patrol officer.

Michael Harding was our speaker for the annual Adult Education Department graduation Ceremony which was held May 18, 2010. He is an outstanding representative of what we strive to do every day in the Adult High School and GED programs – that is, to enable each student to find a career pathway that will enable him or her to enter and complete one of our postsecondary programs and become economically self-sufficient.

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***“Search for a career that makes you happy. I can’t stress [strongly enough] the importance of enjoying what you do for a living.”***

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## Region 3 - *Brevard County*

# Benjamin Wiggins

**School District, State College or Community-Based Organization:**  
Brevard Public Schools Adult & Community Education

**Program/Level Class Enrolled in:**  
"Project Success" – GED

**Years of attendance:** four years

**Goals met by nominee:**  
Passed GED, continuing education at Brevard Community College

**Nominated by:** Brad Bell, Chief Examiner and Mercedes Alvarez, Project Success Teacher – Brevard Public Schools

Ben Wiggins, a young man living with the challenges of cerebral palsy, came to the Central Area Adult Education Center for the first time in March, 2006. He had received a special diploma in 2005 from Merritt Island High School, but was determined to earn a high school diploma so that he could continue on to college. Placed in the Project Success\* class, he was accepted by the group immediately, according to Mercedes Alvarez, the teacher.

"He had a great attitude toward school work no matter how hard or difficult it was," she said. "I would say that he has the three most important 'life skills' that we always discussed (in class): Initiative, Effort and Perseverance."

Committed to helping others, Ben has also volunteered at an elementary school, helping very young students with handicapping conditions.

When he passed the GED, he did it with solid scores. He took advantage of the GED Testing Service accommodations, using large print, extended time, audio and scribe services, according to Brad Bell, Brevard's GED chief examiner.

Ben, like many other young people, enjoys social networking on Facebook. He plans to continue his education at Brevard Community College.

\*Project Success is a transitional program for adult students beyond the age of traditional high school.



## Region 4 - Hillsborough County

# Clara George

**School District, State College or Community-Based Organization:**  
Hillsborough County Public Schools

**Program/Level Class Enrolled in:** ESOL/GED

**Years of attendance:** 1-2 years

**Goals met by nominee:** Clara is from Dominica and learned English, obtained her GED, and has been working as a child-care director for 10-12 years now. She is the lead teacher at the Kimmins Family Learning Center in Ybor City.

**Why this student deserves recognition:** Ms. George has been through several personal challenges and has still obtained her GED and held a very productive leadership position in the HCPS Family Literacy Program.

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**Nominated by:** Thomas Scaglione, II, District Resource Teacher, Hillsborough County Public Schools

Clara George is a tiny woman with a big heart and an even bigger smile. She was a single mother with five children, when in 1991, she decided to go back to school and earn her high school diploma. A friend had mentioned the Adult Education High School on Central Avenue (now the site of Memorial Middle School). She called the administrator, who talked her into coming in and working on her GED. Because of a wonderful new program being offered to parents who were seeking to complete their education, she also enrolled her youngest daughter in the Even Start program at the school. While Clara was in class, so was her daughter, which is how Clara met June Serralles, who was the Parenting Class Instructor. According to Clara, Ms. Serralles was "an inspiration in my life. She was more than a teacher...she was a wonderful role model!" After little more than a year in Clara's GED class, an instructor left the Even Start program, and Clara was asked to temporarily replace her. She subbed for seven months, and when that position was filled permanently, Clara's administrator hired her for another position that was also with Even Start but included home visits and teaching parenting skills.

In 2009, the entire program moved from the Adult High School to Kimmins Family Learning Center, which is a partnership between the Kimmins Foundation, Hillsborough County Public Schools and a federal Even Start Grant. Clara was still doing home visits, teaching in the classroom and attending her GED classes at night. She earned her GED I 2001, and then went on to earn her Child Development Associate credential (CDA) in 2005. She then began working on her Director's credential through Learey Technical Center and completed that in 2006 and was promoted to Director of Family Literacy at Kimmins. Clara said that "my teacher at Learey was awesome and she made the curriculum so much fun." Clara loves her job and is quick to say the "I am a people-person, and truly believe that you can make a difference for the kids!"

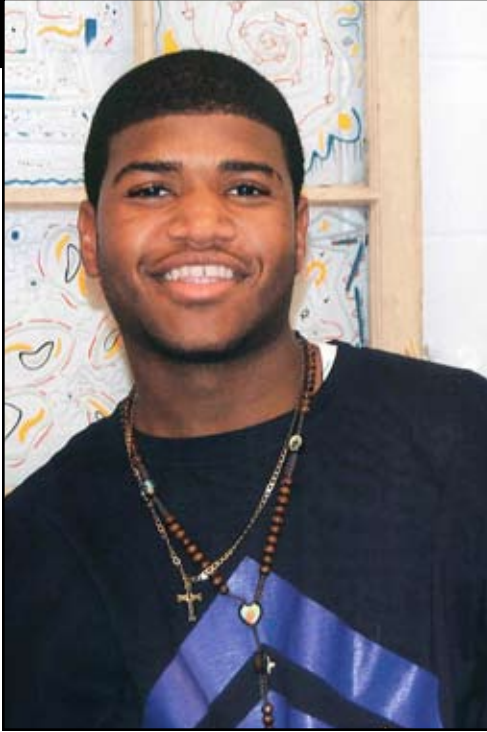
Clara faces obstacles in her job each and every day. The children she works with have often learned things at home that need to be changed, and getting parental support is sometimes a challenge. The program at Kimmins delivers a wide variety of services to the low-income, at-risk population that it serves. Ever mindful of her young charges, Clara keeps up-to-date with current family literacy developments, and she makes it a point to ensure that her youngsters are provided a safe, happy, comfortable environment. According to one of her district co-workers, "Clara is focused on providing the best early childhood experience for the children in the program. She welcomes the entire family and cares about the families functioning as a unit for the benefit of the family."

When asked what career she would have chosen if she hadn't gone into Early Childhood Education, Clara says she would have chosen social work. She also hopes to open a restaurant one day – she loves to cook (something that was apparently inherited by one of her daughters, who is completing her training in the culinary arts). Clara raised her five children as a single mother – 3 boys and 2 girls. Each of them graduated from Hillsborough High School, and all are either working or going to school. She also has a close relationship with her four grandchildren, one of which is enrolled in the program at Kimmins. Clara feels strongly that family literacy is an important aspect of parenting, and her program transmits literacy into the home through home visits and activities, on-site parenting classes, and through Clara's continuous emphasis on school readiness activities for her students. Clara says "I want to say thanks to my Heavenly Father for all my successes. I could not have accomplished any of this without Him." She adds, "My role in life is to work hard, and I am happy if I have touched a child's life in some way." In addition, she sums up her philosophy in one sentence, "If you can reach even a few of the kids, you have been successful." She is a happy, positive role model for her students from infants to Pre-Kindergarten!

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***"You better leave those boys alone and get your school work done!  
Don't let anyone stop you from getting your GED and getting where you want in life."***

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## Region 4 - Hillsborough County

# Mackenly Abraham

**School District, State College or Community-Based Organization:**  
Hillsborough County School District

**Program/Level Class Enrolled in:** High School Credit

**Years of attendance:**

**Goals met by nominee:** He attained his H.S. Diploma and has coordinated a small film. He will be attending Hillsborough Community College this fall.

**Why this student deserves recognition:** He is refreshing for someone his age who does not feel trapped by his surroundings or circumstances. He is focused!

**Nominated by:** Vivian Toney, Educator/Student Services, Hillsborough County School District

Mackenly Abraham has an electric smile and the positive attitude to go with it! He is only 19 years old, but he knows where he wants to go and what he wants to do with his life. At one year of age, his mother moved to America to prepare a better life for him and his sisters. His father moved to America later, but Mackenly stayed in Haiti with his aunt until he was 14 years old. In 2004 he, too, moved to Tampa. He currently shares a home with his mother and two sisters, both of whom attend public schools in Tampa. Mackenly says that in Haiti "my grades were good, although math was always difficult for me. I was in high school when I left Haiti, and I started in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade when I got here." He attended several different high schools in Tampa, but the moving around along with the language difficulty proved to be an obstacle for him. "I was very close to graduating, but when I finished at my last school, I didn't have the right credits. My counselor told me about Brewster, but I didn't want to go to a technical school. I wanted to graduate from a regular high school." But he also wanted to graduate as soon as he could, and although Mackenly missed the summer session at Brewster that year, he started in the fall of 2008 and graduated in June, 2009.

"When I first got to Brewster I really didn't feel good (about the school). There were certain people that were looking at me like I didn't want to do work and it wasn't like that and it could have been because the way I was dressing. Then as I started going to class, the teachers started to like me; then more people started liking me because I would help them with projects and things like that." Mackenly goes on to add, "I passed the classes – I came to school keeping my head straight and everything and kept myself together. I ended up with 28 or 29 credits."

Mackenly's goal is to become a movie director. As he says, "I got into the movie thing when I was 14 in Haiti. When I came to America I started looking at TV and I started liking it. And then I would go to my dad's house, I would get his camera and I started going to church and filming events...at first I wanted to be a cameraman, but as I got older I want to be a director. But to be a director you have to be a cameraman first."

Eventually, Mackenly would like to attend Georgia State University in Atlanta and he wants to earn a Bachelor's and Master's degree. Right now, though, he is busy filming a movie right here on location in Tampa that he hopes to submit to the BET Film Festival. With Mackenly's amazing confidence and enthusiasm, don't be surprised to see his movie on TV!

## Region 5 - Miami-Dade County



# Magda Erika

**School District, State College or Community-Based Organization:**  
Miami-Dade County Public Schools

**Program/Level Class Enrolled in:** ESOL High-Beginning – Academic

**Years of attendance:** 2001-2003

**Goals met by nominee:** Personal: Obtain a degree and a job doing what I like the best...orienting students and assisting families. Educational: Master's Degree in Social Work (2008), Bachelor's Degree in Social Work (2007). Work: Full-time job as a family therapist; part-time at MDCP-S Concierge Program.

**Why this student deserves recognition:** Magda has used life challenges to better herself and to be a positive influence in our society. She not only learned a new language, but also went on to get a Master's Degree in her field. She is living proof of the 'American Dream.'

**Nominated by:** Linda Pruitt, Program Coordinator, The English Center

Magda Erika's amazing journey began on January 27, 2002 when she arrived in Miami from her native country of Colombia. Her parents had decided that it was better for her to move to the United States and live a different life with more opportunities than those available to her in her native country. She began taking adult education classes in ESOL at The English Center just two days after arriving in the U.S. She found learning English a formidable challenge but through intense and sustained effort she was able to successfully complete all the ESOL levels The English Center offered.

She also completed a vocational program in computers. With her adult education experience behind her, she was accepted into Miami Dade College. At Miami Dade College, she continued to study English and worked her way up to being able to take actual "for credit" courses. She graduated from Miami Dade College with an Associate of Arts Degree in July of 2004. She then transferred to Florida International University and finished her bachelor's degree in Social Work. Shortly after obtaining her bachelor's degree, she was accepted into a post-graduate program and obtained her master's degree in Clinical Social Work. She graduated with honors from that program in December of 2008.

In looking back at her experience, Magda explains, "Even today, it seems surreal to look back on all those years of hard work. I was a full-time student juggling to maintain two part-time jobs, one as a cashier at a supermarket and the other one working for The English Center's SAVES program. It was so hard to keep up my good grades; making time for study, for work, and for my family was a constant struggle." During this time, from 2004 to 2009, Magda also worked as a volunteer for Vitas Hospice—conducting home and hospital visits with terminally ill patients.

Today, Magda feels that her experience of going from not knowing English to obtaining a master's degree in six years helped her to become a better person and a better professional. Her part-time job at The English Center allows her to contribute to the community and connect her professional knowledge with the love, determination, and compassion within her that she learned to make the most of when she first arrived in this country. As part of her future plans, she hopes to obtain her license as a social worker and one day open a private practice. "I also wish to continue inspiring young people like me to pursue their dreams and be the best that they can be," says Magda. "I once heard that we all are ordinary people capable of doing extraordinary things, and I am certain that education is the key to being able to accomplish extraordinary dreams."

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*"Never sell yourself short. I used to think my brain was not good enough to learn a new language. I arrived to this country 8 years ago and I proved myself. Hard work pays off. Now, I am bilingual and in the process of learning a third language."*

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## Region 5 - Broward County

# Verlin Silencieux

**School District, State College or Community-Based Organization:** Broward County

**Program/Level Class Enrolled in:** ESOL 1-5, ABE 1 & 2 and GED

**Years of attendance:** three years

**Goals met by the nominee:** Verlin came to the U.S. three years ago and spoke no English. He learned to speak English and received his GED.

**Why this student deserves recognition:** Verlin had nearly perfect attendance for three years. He arrived at school at 7:40 a.m. and stayed until 2:00 p.m. He was a very hard worker who was always willing to help other students. He learned English and passed his GED.

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**Nominator:** Colleen Warren, GED Teacher, Broward County

Growing up in Haiti without a mother was very depressing and hard. She left for America when I was four years old. As soon as she moved to America she applied for my brother, sister and me to join her, but it didn't happen so soon. My life was difficult. I missed my mom very much. She couldn't visit us and my grandparents raised us. They worked, but they struggled to earn money for food. I attended school in Haiti until I was 16 years old. That's when kidnappings and killings were happening on a daily basis and I was scared to go to school, so I never graduated.

When I turned 17, my visa came through and my family was back together in America. When I arrived in America I didn't speak any English. I enrolled in the adult program at Hallandale Adult Community Center because I wanted to learn English and make a better life for myself. I don't know what I would have done without HACC and the teachers who work there. I started school in 2007. It took me one year to complete ESOL 1, ESOL 2, ESOL 3, ESOL 4, and ESOL 5. I came to school every day at 7:40 AM unless I had an appointment. I was very proud of myself, but my main goal was to receive my GED.

After completing ESOL 5, I started in ABE 1, graduated to ABE 2 and continued to the final class of GED. While I was preparing for my GED test, the earthquake hit in Haiti and I didn't know if my grandparents were dead or alive. I tried to call them but the phone lines were down. It was difficult to come to school and concentrate not knowing the situation, but the anguish I felt didn't deter me from heading toward my dream. It was becoming a reality.

The first time I took the GED, I missed passing by 20 points. I signed up to take it again and just received my passing scores. I am a graduate! I am looking forward to my future. Now I feel that it is my responsibility to help raise and teach my younger siblings English.

My mother is working as a security guard and we are struggling financially. I applied for Broward College in Pembroke Pines and I already filled out my financial aid form for school. It has always been my dream to become a doctor.

During my time at Hallandale Adult Community Center, I participated in the School Advisory Council. As a citizen of the community, I volunteered to attend these meetings for two years and as an active member, I was integral in writing and communicating the school improvement plan to high school students and to the Hallandale Beach community.

Without the HACC, I would never have learned English or received by diploma. I would be sitting home without hope for the future. I feel like this program is a second chance for people who didn't graduate from high school in their country.

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***“In life nothing comes easy. You have to work hard to get whatever you need.  
I hope my life story inspires someone to continue during their struggles to achieve success.”***

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## Region 5 - Miami-Dade County



### Yanami Ferrer

**School District, State College or Community-Based Organization:** Miami-Dade County Public Schools

**Program/Level Class Enrolled in:** ESOL I – ESOL Advanced

**Years of attendance:** 05/1998 – 12/2000

**Goals met by the nominee:** In three years, she validated her teaching degree from Cuba and began teaching senior learners, became a National Board certified Spanish teacher, she was selected for the International Baccalaureate Organization, earned a master of science, served as Area of Interaction Leader and is a member of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. She is also board-certified in mathematics.

**Why this student deserves recognition:** From the moment Yanami arrived in this country, she has been determined to realize her dream through the opportunities in Adult Education. Making the most of the educational and community resources that were available to her, Yanami used her opportunities to become a leader in education herself, serving as a mentor and role model for her students and community as an example of what commitment and persistence can accomplish.

**Nominated by:** Dr. Nilda J. Diaz, Principal, Hialeah-Miami Lakes Adult and Community Education Center

Yanami Ferrer began her climb to success with great hope and determination. As soon as she arrived in the country from Cuba in 1998, she enrolled in beginning ESOL classes at Hialeah-Miami Lakes Adult and Community Education Center. From the beginning, she was an enthusiastic and dedicated student, taking extra classes at Miami-Dade Community College. In just three years of study, she could validate her teaching degree from Cuba, and began teaching senior learners at HML Adult.

But that was just the beginning for Yanami, who continues to add to her list of accomplishments and successes. Most recently, she became a National Board-certified Spanish teacher at North Dade Middle School, a magnet school and part of the Miami Dade County Public Schools. She has been selected for the International Baccalaureate Organization, earned a master of science, served as Area of Interaction Leader, and is a member of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. She is also Board-certified in mathematics.

Yanami certainly found the right environment for success at HML Adult. Teachers and counselors at the adult education center helped her form goals and forge a path to reach them. She had plans even before she came to the United States, but her studies at HML Adult were a big part of all she accomplished. It all began at HML Adult, Yanami says, and she credits the school with giving her the opportunity to persist and achieve.

Yanami is not a person who is content with degrees and certifications alone, though. She uses her training and skills to make a difference as an educator for her students and her community—a caring, inspiring mentor for students, as well as a professional who is committed to establishing and maintaining high standards in teaching.

Yanami, a proud new homeowner, continues to perform in a spirit of excellence. For her, it's always what she wants to accomplish next, not what she's already done. Her goals get higher and higher as she goes from achievement to achievement. We applaud her enthusiasm, commitment, and just plain hard work; the results so far are awesome!

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*“I had hopes and plans when came to the United States, but HML Adult helped me set a path to realize them. All that I hoped for has come true, and I am so appreciative of the vision and support I received at HML Adult. I want to continue to give back to all learners the great gifts I have received.”*

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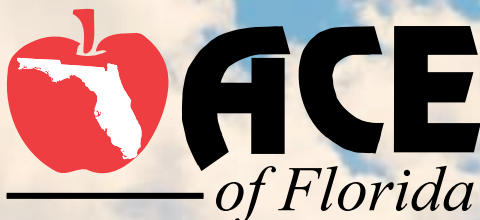
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