

Forging Ahead

For One Determined Student, Goals Are Never Beyond Reach

TWENTY-THREE MILES. Twenty-three miles climbing over 1,000 feet of elevation gain. No car.

When Michael Chumley found himself unexpectedly stranded at home in Breen, he had two choices: 1.) call the Durango Adult Education Center and cancel his GED test, or 2.) trek to town any way possible.

Michael loaded a backpack with snacks and water. He got on a bike and started pedaling.

"It was definitely a rough ride...23 miles all along a highway. And I was wearing boots and jeans," Michael recalls. "I just kept telling myself, as long as I make it!"

Michael had been pushing himself along with that mantra ever since he was 12 and discovered exactly what he wanted to do as a career.

His uncle, a welder, invited Michael to the garage and literally passed the torch.

"He told me to weld this metal bar together and I did. And I really enjoyed it!" Michael beams. From that moment, Michael's motivation was forever soldered and set.

Which is why, when his ride to town fell through, Michael did not hesitate to hop on a bike and pedal to Durango on a blazing October

day. "It was hot," Michael says. "I looked like I'd been dragged out of a swimming pool when I got there."

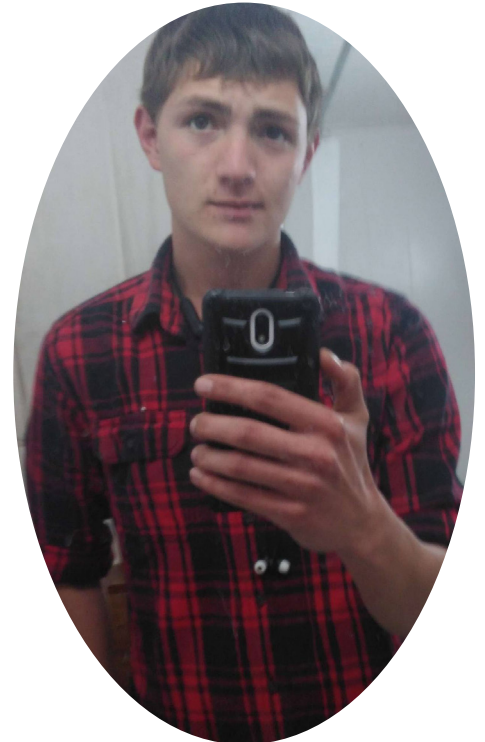
Long before car trouble, Michael suffered other setbacks. Frequent moves between Texas, Oklahoma, Kentucky, and Utah prompted Michael to try a home school program. He notes, "I actually did so well on my pretest for my sophomore year that they bumped me up to a junior."

Unfortunately, three months later, a paperwork snafu between Oklahoma's educational systems yanked Michael back into sophomore status. All the work he'd completed was deemed ineligible for any credit.

Undeterred, Michael enrolled in a GED program. After two semesters, he was still working on the same math lessons. The coursework seemed to be spinning its wheels. Michael felt stuck.

When he and his mom relocated to Durango, they found the DAEC. Once enrolled, Michael had to creatively adapt to education in a pandemic. Without a laptop, he used his phone to attend the Zoom classes and complete the online lessons. Tech issues aside, Michael noticed something very strange about the teachers at the Center.

"The teachers there were more involved," Michael notes. "I'm not



Michael Chumley relied on his phone and his resolute nature to attain his GED.

gonna lie—I absolutely love the teachers there!"

Not only were the teachers more involved with the students, but also they used a surprising approach. "One of the amazing things was that the teachers even asked us: how would you like us to teach you? They actually wanted to know how their students wanted to learn. It was very motivational, I would say, because they want you to get it done and they want you to do your best," Michael attests.

Nine weeks after enrolling in the DAEC, Michael completed all of

From the Director



Susan Hakanson, Executive Director

NORWEGIANS HAVE A word, *koselig*, that means “a sense of coziness.” The word acts as a candle guiding people through the dark, frigid northern winters not with dread, but celebration. This philosophy can likewise guide us through the unprecedented challenges we currently face. For instance, it’s easy to take for granted the cozy comforts and necessities we can access. Consider technology. It connects us to others; provides a video visit with loved ones; enables working safely from home. It allows us to apply for assistance, order necessary medications, or even nab a little food. This one tool...this one comfort is an unattainable luxury for most of our students. And it is not the only one.

Heading into our 34th year serving this Southwest Colorado region with quality educational opportunities for

our most vulnerable populations during a crippling global pandemic has been an unthinkable challenge all its own. The DAEC is working hard to meet these challenges with our characteristic compassion and tenacity.

I am honored to work with the highly qualified and dedicated staff at the Centers in Durango and Cortez. They strive to keep students engaged online. Completing a high school equivalency or developing literacy skills in English, now more than ever, could mean the difference between traumatic poverty and empowering possibilities.

I would like to express my abundant gratitude for your ongoing support of the Durango Adult Education Center. Our donors and volunteers truly change lives. You may not be here with us to see it every day, but the effects are profound. Your donations immensely improve our students’ social and economic well-being, and in turn, our community. In this time of uncertainty, let’s find *koselig*, or comfort, in helping those who need it. Please consider making a year-end donation to the DAEC.

I wish you all a safe and healthy winter holiday season, no matter how you celebrate. May we find ways to enjoy our homes and families by sending notes or cards, taking long walks in the neighborhood (with tea), reading a good book, snuggling under a blanket (with more tea), and allowing ourselves to slow down. May we embrace this time to just be home and away from group settings (I suggest tea and cookies). May we celebrate the protection we offer ourselves, our families, and our neighbors. We can fill these physical voids with spacious hearts.

✧ Susan

Forging Ahead continued...

his GED subject tests.

“I’m not gonna lie. I don’t get giddy very often. But when I got my test scores, I was as giddy as a five-year-old at a birthday party! It’s just such a huge accomplishment for me because I did all the work and I never made up an excuse not to go. I was super proud of myself.”

When Michael stops to consider all the obstacles he has had to overcome in recent years, he realizes that he possesses a unique quality. “I learned I have self-determination,” he says. “Like it’s not someone else’s job to make sure you do it. For me, I could see my goal was to get my GED and I need to do this. So every time I think: I want my GED—it always had an ‘I’ in it, so it’s my job.”

The distance between Michael and the tech school he has chosen to pursue welding may extend across several hundred miles. Even so, Michael remains unfazed. His innate talent for welding allows him to see precisely how to bridge the gaps between where he is and where he wants to be.

Call 970-385-4354 or email info@durangoadulted.org for more information on Spring 2021 registration.



The Impact of Your Support

When Helping Sounds Good

The Fine Art of Hearing Students Succeed

CONSIDER THE WORDS *ton* and *ten*. They are very similar, except for one letter in the middle. How about *hip* and *hit*. Again, nearly identical except for that last letter. And yet, those tiny differences are enough to totally transform each word's meaning.

A hip and a hit are nothing alike. Ten donuts are nothing compared to a ton of them.

Clear communication hinges on these small distinctions.

Karyn Reid spent most of her life noticing the miniscule differences between words while working as a speech pathologist. "Speech pathologists," she explains, "work with children and adults with communication difficulties. It could be difficulties learning language to start with, difficulties with articulation or speech production, or with stuttering, difficulties with

voice problems. Working with the adult population, we work a lot with people who've had strokes, head injuries, those types of things."

Karyn specialized in working with children. Once retired, she applied to volunteer as a tutor at the Durango Adult Education Center. She thought she'd be a good fit for students learning to read. Sarah Brown, the volunteer coordinator for the English-as-a-Second Language program, had a better idea.

"We have people interested in volunteering who have such amazing resumés," Brown points out, listing former professors from FLC and MIT, as well as former Facebook employees. Karyn's background in pathology made her a perfect fit for foreign students learning English and needing to refine their pronunciation.

The Center paired Karyn with several Asian students. Immediately, Karyn's keen ears picked up on subtle aspects muddling the students' pronunciation.

For instance, whenever an English word ended with an 'm' sound, the students typically substituted the letter 'n.'

"Like instead of come home, it was *cun hone*," Karyn explains.

Armed with that insight, Karyn could then train the students to listen for and reproduce those pesky m's.

At a glance, singling out these tiny phonetic elements can seem like an exercise in nit-picking; however, for Karyn clear sounds are just as important as sentence structure and vocabulary.

"If you're not understood, you're not communicating," she says. "If you don't have the vocabulary or the sentence structure, you're not communicating."

In light of Karyn's specialized expertise, one might easily assume these tutoring sessions cost students a fortune. On the contrary, the Adult Education Centers in Durango and Cortez provide the targeted and tailored language tutoring for free because language and literacy are gateways to social and economic mobility. Many of the Center's ESL students go on to higher-paying jobs. They can also fully enjoy participating in community groups and activities.



To facilitate in-person learning during the pandemic, Karyn (right) and a student socially distance on her back porch.



Durango Adult Education Center

Serving Southwest Colorado

701 Camino del Rio, Ste. 301
Durango, CO 81301



**with a year-end gift
to the DEAC**

Upcoming Events

Tuesday, December 8

Colorado Gives & SWCO Gives Day

December 14-18

Registration

Wednesday, December 16

Cortez HSE Virtual Graduation Ceremony

Thursday, December 17

Durango HSE Virtual Graduation Ceremony

January 4-7

Registration

Our Mission

The Durango Adult Education Center, a caring learning community, fills educational gaps by providing the skills and knowledge necessary for livable wage careers, post-secondary education, and social and economic mobility.



Helping Sounds Good continued...

Removing these obstacles for students continually inspires Karyn to volunteer. "I can't imagine how difficult it is to come to a different country with minimal English skills and jump into life. So I'm glad I can help people make an easier transition," she says.

Her volunteerism is also mutually beneficial. Karyn explains, "I think it's a great way to learn more about other cultures and expand your world. I think our world needs a whole lot more understanding."

This kind of meaningful, attentive listening has forged deep friendships between Karyn and her students. She notes, "They know I'm really interested in them and not just in the fact that, oh, you don't say your final f's or you don't have all the vowel sounds you need to have. I want to know about *you*. I think that's the commonality of all good teachers. You have to be interested in your students as people and not just in your subject matter."

To learn more about volunteer opportunities at the Adult Education Centers in Durango and Cortez, call 970-385-4354 or email info@durangoadulted.org