

# TIDINGS

*Durango & Cortez Adult Education Center Spring 2021 Newsletter*

## Finishing What She Started

*one mother's  
tireless quest for an  
education*

"LET ME TELL YOU A LITTLE STORY about me when I was seventeen and I came to the United States," Diana Chavez says.

As a GED student with only two tests between her and a June graduation, Diana appears confident, even relaxed, while chatting in the humanities classroom at the Cortez Adult Education Center. However, revisiting this childhood memory casts shadows over her normally honey-sweet and sunshine-bright mood.

She and her father rode a bus from Chihuahua, Mexico to the U.S. The bus stopped in Arizona. The passengers were directed to the nearby fast food chain to order food before the long journey pressed on.

Father and daughter felt their stomachs knot and growl. Even so, neither ordered any food. They couldn't read the menu. They did not have the English words to tell the cashier at the register what they wanted.

Diana and her father boarded the bus.

"It's hard when you don't know the language or anything," Diana concludes. "So hard!"

From that young age, she realized language was survival. It was access to food and drink. It represented doorways to work, income, and opportunities.

Eventually, Diana pursued English as a Second Language (ESL) classes. Her teacher, Mary Fuller, also happened to double as the CAEC's Career Advisor. With Diana's language skills excelling, Mary encouraged her to enroll in the High School Equivalency (HSE) program.

"I thought: *Oh it's too hard! I cannot do it.* For me, it was a challenge to do my GED in a different language," Diana says.

Despite her doubts, she enrolled. She knew starting is every person's toughest hurdle. "The fear is to start," she says. "Just start because if you don't, nothing happens."

Diana began classes in 2018. The workload was tough on top of her own job, as well as her responsibilities as a wife and mother. She woke at six to prep meals for the family. Then she got her six- and eleven-year old daughters ready and dropped off at school all before she arrived at her day's first class.

Social pressures added to her burdens. Diana recalls, "People tell me: *Why do you go to school? You're too old!*"

She had a ready answer, "I tell them because when I was younger, I had to work. Now it's my chance."

Nonetheless, fatigue took its toll. One day while in her math class, Diana felt so drained, she could barely focus on fractions, integers, and variables.

*If you just quit...you could rest. Life would be so much easier.*

The thought slid into her awareness as easily as a snake sneaks into a mouse's burrow.

The temptation to quit and rest was so strong that her chair became inexplicably uncomfortable. As Diana shifted in her seat, she saw the sign on the wall:

**DON'T QUIT.**



*HSE and ESL student Diana Chavez is ready for graduation and new opportunities.*

*continued on page 2...*

## From the Director

Only a few days ago, tiny buds beaded the trees and shrubs. Now, everywhere I look, those beads have burst into a fanfare of blossoms. Joy is not just a feeling; it is a scent sweetening the air. After such a tumultuous year, is it any wonder that the arrival of spring feels more triumphant than any other in memory?

Our southwest communities, and indeed, the world at large, is also springing back and blossoming back to an almost normal existence. Our learning centers in Durango and Cortez are also blossoming.

Our teachers, career advisors, and support staff have poured their hearts into their work. And although we may not always notice, behind every blossom is a mighty branch. Our supportive branches stem from our Board of Directors, and we are always grateful for their guidance. Lastly, we must recognize our students. When it might have been way easier to hunker down and hide, students found the courage and fortitude to climb past a barrier to their futures.

The fruits of all this teamwork are on track to ripen over the coming weeks. First, we celebrate our HSE students as they graduate with a GED diploma on Friday, June 4th at 6:00pm.

Then, on Saturday, June 12th we host The Fast and the Curious 5k/10k challenge. This fun run with brain games celebrates the reciprocal link between physical health and mental well-being. As a longtime runner and yoga instructor, I am always fascinated by the science that proves out our connection between physical activity and brain health.

And, just in time for summer reading, we are so thrilled to launch a new literacy initiative! Bound for Learning, a community book club for curious and continuous learners will meet monthly to discuss an outstanding, entertaining, and insightful book. In July, we kick off with *The Diné Reader: An Anthology of Navajo Literature* with long-time board member, Connie Jacobs leading the talk.

Please consult our website for full details regarding all these special events, or have them delivered to your inbox when you subscribe to our e-newsletter. In light of all our news, it's clear that every single student we serve, every benchmark we reach, every celebration is a springtime bead—a bud that blossoms and a sign that we are flourishing.

Susan 



*Susan Hakanson, Executive Director*

## Finishing continued...

She froze. The message hit the burning temptation in her head the way a bucket of water hits a lit match head. She would not quit. She would see this challenge through.

By now, Diana has passed two of the four GED subject tests. Before June, she plans to take the final two subject tests, math and social studies. Many an afternoon, she and her daughters complete their homework together. Like every mom, Diana multi-tasks, planting one eye on the books and the other on her future. She is considering pursuing a career in healthcare or technology.

“Every career is good,” she says. “If you say: I want to be a doctor or a teacher or whatever, that’s a good choice because you’re not staying all to yourself. You are helping others.”

As the spindly hands on the classroom clock arc towards midday, Diana gathers her coat and purse. Her math class is meeting outdoors in the park.

In the doorway, she pauses to say, “Never give up on your dreams. If you don’t know a language, like me, you can learn it here. Just trust in yourself. Even if someone tells you ‘you’re too old,’ you’re not! It’s not too late! If you have a school like this, take the chance.”



Save the date! On **June 4th, 2021**, the Durango and Cortez Adult Education Center will host a live watch party for the recorded **Spring Graduation Ceremony at 6:00pm**.

For more details and to find out how you can be a graduation backer, contact Jenny Mason, 970-385-4354.





# The Impact of Your Support

## ¡Exitosa!

### learning the language of success

TED DASHED INTO THE BISTRO. He snatched the blue French horn sculpture off its wall mounts. With angry waiters in hot pursuit, Ted sprang into the cab where his friends Marshall, Lily, and Barney waited in the backseat.

The cab sped away, whisking Ted to a first-kiss rendezvous with his new love, Robin.

"Everybody brings flowers." Ted shrugged to his fellow passengers.

Before the laugh track cackled, Araceli Bañuelos paused the sitcom.

She and husband Ryan are huge *How I Met Your Mother* fans. But for Araceli, the show is more than merely entertaining; it's also homework. In fact, Araceli watches every program with subtitles on. Whenever a new, unfamiliar word or phrase snags her ears, she freezes the screen to methodically study the English language.

Since 2019, Araceli has pursued learning English at the Durango Adult Education Center. The grease-

scald scars and oven burns on her forearms underscore why she studies with gusto.

"I work as a cook in a kitchen," Araceli says. "It's good work but totally different. In Mexico, I was a professional, but not here."

Long before she ever came to the U.S., Araceli grew up in Guadalajara, Mexico. Steeped in its rich, cultural atmosphere, surrounded by lush, tropical landscapes, she yearned to become a dancer. As often happens, life unfolded differently.

"When my son was five years old, I was divorced," she says. "I needed to support my child. My brothers worked in insurance and they had time for family and themselves. I thought: I can do that!"

Indeed, she could. Over a 12-year span, Araceli cultivated a long client list selling insurance through MetLife. "In Mexico, we say *exitosa*." She explains that the word means success.

Then while traveling in 2015, she met Durango, Colorado native and resident, Ryan. Both were smitten. After Araceli returned home, she realized something was absent from her life. She notes, "My life in Mexico was not happy. I was alone. I was sad."

Two years later, the couple was married. "We're very lucky." Ryan smiles as he gazes at Araceli.

She blushes and cannot hold back a huge smile. She credits Ryan for being so supportive. "He has been my chauffeur...my photographer...my chef...and my best friend."

Along came an incredible opportunity, seemingly plucked from a sitcom plot: the local Aflac agency needed a bilingual insurance agent to better educate non-English speakers about the importance of health, home, and life insurance. They wanted to tap Araceli's extraordinary talents assuming she passed the required certification tests—each one administered in English, of course! ESL instructor Michelle Hall readily agreed to tutor Araceli outside of class.

"Michelle was so helpful for me. She's a good teacher!" Araceli attests.

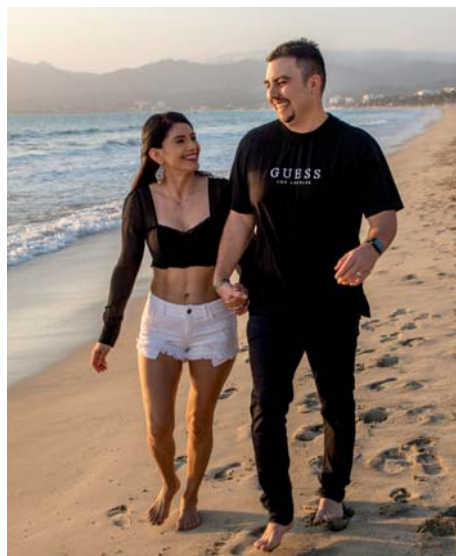
At last, in March 2021, Araceli passed the tests. The week before starting her new job, Araceli confessed that although she is nervous, she knows she will succeed.

"Every day, I continue, continue, continue. I'm..." she pauses to find the right word, "...persistent. I want, I want! I can do it! It's not always easy for me, but I don't give up. Every single day—"

Araceli completes the sentence with a mighty fist punch that clearly communicates her drive to achieve *exitosa*!



Araceli Bañuelos is fluent in the language of success.



Araceli and Ryan always support each other.



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**Announcing Two Open Seats on  
the DAEC's Board of Directors!**

Email your letter of interest to:  
[shakanson@durangoadulted.org](mailto:shakanson@durangoadulted.org)

## 2020 Benchmarks

# 323

total learners served

# 196

learners studied for GED

**22** students achieved a GED (high school equivalent diploma).

**70** students representing **18** countries learned English.

**148** individuals received career & support services through the BOOST Program. Additionally, **19** learners were awarded over

**\$45,200** in scholarships for early childhood education training.

**22** women entrepreneurs received over **\$24,000** in assistance.

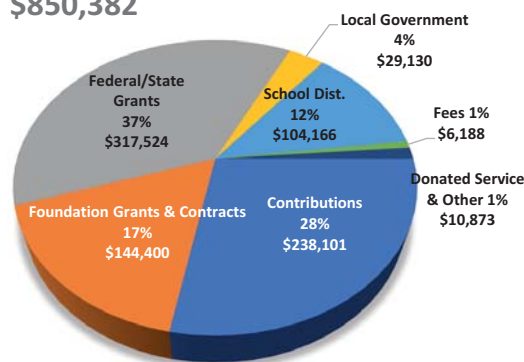
**259** career certification and licensure tests were administered at our public testing center.

Volunteers donated **312** service hours.

## 2020 Finances

Total Income 2020

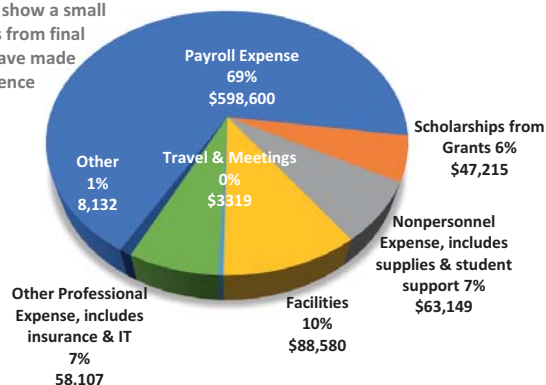
**\$850,382**



Total Expense 2020

**\$864,102\***

While we do show a small deficit, funds from final PPP grants have made up the difference for 2020.



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## Durango Adult Education Center

*Serving Southwest Colorado*

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



## Upcoming Events

**Friday, June 4th, 6:00pm**

Durango & Cortez HSE Graduation Ceremony  
Live Watch Party

**Saturday, June 12th, 8:00am-11:00am**

The Fast & the Curious Benefit Run

**Thursday, July 15th, 7:00-8:15pm**

Bound for Learning Book Club Launch

**Monday, August 30th**

Fall Classes Begin

**September TBD**

Literacy Luncheon

## 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.



## Booked All Summer

### *a new community book club*

Ever since its founding in 1987, our Center has promoted literacy. We are so excited to announce our newest literacy initiative:

### **Bound for Learning**

*a community book club for curious and continuous learners*

Join us **July 15th at 7pm** (live or virtual location TBD) as we gather to discuss the book club's inaugural text, *The Diné Reader: An Anthology of Navajo Literature*. Because this text is a first-of-its-kind collection, we'll probe excerpts with contributing editors and authors as our guides.

Receive **25% off** your copy of *The Diné Reader* at Maria's Bookshop when you join Bound for Learning! Membership is free; however, for those who join with a donation to the DAEC, we offer a stylish tote bag as thanks.

Visit our website to join the club and kick off your summer reading!

