

# TIDINGS

*Durango & Cortez Adult Education Center Spring 2023 Newsletter*

## Fostering Hope and Happiness

### *For Foster Mother, Citizenship Essential for Family Stability*

**FOSTER OFFICIALS HANDED THE** two-year-old child to Gladys Martinez. She was an experienced foster parent and the agency staked their hopes on her skills to nurture. This child had been born to drug addicts. He harbored addiction and suffered as a result.

Night after night, the child cried. Day after day, he cried. Gladys and her husband fretted. Time passed. The child made progress as he grew. But Gladys only housed him at intervals. When his parents were struggling with drug addictions, he stayed with Gladys. When they were clean, he went home.

"He would come back with no color to him. He would cry and cry. He was a different boy. And I am feeling angry because I don't know what happened," Gladys recalls.

Each time he returned to her, the boy's face was ashen. His hair was dirty. He refused to be hugged or touched. Gladys could take no more of this suffering. The child deserved a real home. Whatever the cost, whatever the hassles—Gladys would not rest until she had adopted the boy.

But there was a problem. Gladys was neither a permanent resident nor a citizen of the United States. Although the native Colombian has an American husband, U.S. citizenship is not granted automatically. Gladys must still go through the process of becoming a citizen.

Citizenship candidates face an arduous and expensive challenge. First, they must prepare for the naturalization test, which includes reading and writing assessments, as well as an oral civics test. Next, they must complete an interview with an immigration officer where they showcase their English comprehension and communication skills. The path to citizenship can take up to 15 months in some cases. Gladys could not promise the child stability until she first attained full citizenship.

Gladys enrolled in English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) classes near her home in Bloomfield, New Mexico, but she struggled to make progress. The teachers also spoke Spanish. Often, they would switch into Spanish to help her. The gesture was kind, but not helpful. How could she learn English while continuing to speak Spanish in the classroom? In 2020, during the pandemic, she found the Adult Education Center in Durango and quickly signed up.

"Here, the classes are focused in English and they teach always in English. I love it! The teachers have passion. I love it! It's nice. I love the people in my classes and I love my teachers. I don't mind the drive," Gladys reports.

Meanwhile, the child continued to split his time between his biological and foster families. He bounced from neglect and trauma to a healthy, happy existence. Gladys quit her job and doubled down on both the citizenship and adoption processes.

She began meeting with Marie Roessler, a volunteer for the Adult Education Center's Citizenship Program. She and Gladys met regularly to study for the required civics test and to practice English. Gladys says, "For me, I prepared every day. I listen to English in my car. I listen to the questions while driving." She made flash cards. She read magazines. She poured through books. She watched TV with subtitles. She listened to music in English. "So in my home, no Spanish TV. No Spanish books. Nothing. When I study, it's only English. It works for me," she says.

At last, in 2022, all of Gladys's hard work was put to the test. She filed the last round of adoption papers and attended the final court hearings.



*Gladys with citizenship tutor, Marie*

*continued on page 2...*

## From the Director

Courage.

Finding the courage to move forward against staggering odds. This is what comes to mind for me this spring as I witness our students' forward momentum.

The concept that courage is not the absence of fear, but rather the triumph over it – forwarded by Nelson Mandela – is the story of so many of our students.

Students whose lives perhaps didn't follow a "traditional" path for a wide variety of reasons find themselves at DAEC to study English as a second Language, gain basic literacy skills or complete a high school diploma.



*Susan Hakanson, Executive Director*

This past year, DAEC welcomed students from five continents and students from all over the western United States. Students from the US with little or no formal education, to students with absolutely no English but advanced degrees; students who stepped away from traditional high school to finish ahead of schedule, to students who left school 20 years prior to support families. Students who fled treasured but war-torn countries, to students who fled cult compounds that didn't allow education. Students who have one definite thing in common: courage.

We could not be more proud of our students. It is truly an honor to serve this incredible population as they work hard to forge a path to their future.

Courage starts with deciding to take control of your own future. Courage means showing up even when it's hard or scary. Courage is evident as you make your own way forward.

DAEC could not do this important work without the support of our community. Through your volunteer efforts and generous donations, DAEC is moving into a 36th year with the resolve and passion to live up to our mission:

"To fill educational gaps by providing the skills and knowledge necessary for livable wage careers, post-secondary education, and social and economic mobility."

DAEC thanks all students, volunteers, staff, board members, donors and friends for joining us on this incredible and courageous path.

Susan

## Fostering Hope, continued...

Her naturalization interview and test were scheduled for that fall.

A few weeks before the interview, the adoption officials contacted Gladys. Her petition to adopt the child had been approved! She and her husband were his rightful, lawful parents now. As if eager to shed his former self, the child selected a new name. Ian. He wanted to be called Ian.



*Gladys with husband and adopted son, Ian*

After her naturalization interview and test, Gladys was informed that she had passed. She was now a U.S. citizen. "There is no

more weight on my back," she exhales and slumps dramatically back into her chair. "For me it's all good news. It's a perfect year! Now I am so happy I adopt [Ian]."

To celebrate, the new family took a trip to Colombia. It was Gladys's first trip home in five years. Her family embraced Ian with open arms. He played in the mountains with his cousins. They visited waterfalls. He saw big cities.

Gladys is now pondering her future as a citizen, eligible for many rights, benefits, and career paths. Picking a career will be tough. Gladys is interested in everything. She loves painting. She loves animals. She loves dancing. She especially loves photography. She took photography classes at San Juan College. "I love to learn. I love it! My brain is busy always. Busy, busy, busy!"

She has time to figure out the next chapter of her life. She'd like Ian to be a few years older before she resumes working. For now, she continues to practice English. "No relax. I keep studying," she resolves. She volunteers at Ian's school. Her goal is to make the kids smile and have a good day. Gladys is determined to make sure the people around her, the people she cares about, are happy. "Oh! You're sad! Why? Be happy! Always happy. Smile."





# The Impact of Your Support

## Explosive Ideas

### How Grace Johnson Blew Up Her Life...More Than Once

#### BOOM!

That is the sound of Grace Johnson radically changing her life. A few decades ago, Grace worked as a secretary for an explosives company in Arizona. She processed piles of blast reports as the company blasted craters for the mining and drilling industry. "It was all numbers to me," Grace says.

Over time, Grace learned more about her field. She learned how to operate the big equipment and how to wield explosives. The young Navajo woman then applied to work as a driller and shooter at a mine. She was hired.

"So they dig the holes in the ground with the drill. And then, as a shooter, we come and load the holes with boosters, and cord, and emulsion, and stuff like that. And then we blast it," Grace explains.

Securing a good-paying career mattered to Grace. She was a single mom supporting three kids. She had no high school diploma or college degrees to pave the way to financial stability. When her children grew up, Grace was on her own. She suddenly had time to ponder: what were her true passions? What had her dreams been before necessity pushed her into the mining industry?

"I always wanted to do something with social work or nursing," Grace notes.

#### Boom!

Her life shifted radically once more. She found a senior care facility in Durango that would train her to become a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA). They'd even help her get her license.

"It was a whole new career change for me. I was overwhelmed at the beginning because I didn't know the job. I'm always intimidated by new changes at first, but I feel like I want to do it. I put my mind to something and I want to do it."

Today, Grace works in rehabilitation and hospice care as a CNA. She explains, "I usually work the mornings. I get the residents ready for their day." She sees to their physical hygiene, brushing hair and teeth, bathing, shaving, and dressing. Her shifts can span 8, 12, or 16 hours.

Although she loved finally working in healthcare, Grace fell short of feeling at home in her new career. Sometimes, in order to feel at home, we need to go back home. That was true for Grace. "At the time," she says, "my plan was to go home back to the Navajo reservation. I wanted to get a job with the school district or with the hospital. But they require a GED or a high school diploma."

In January 2022, she enrolled in high school equivalency (HSE) classes at the Adult Education Center in Durango.

"Now, finally, I'm working on myself. I'm doing it backwards," she laughs. Grace has since completed two of the four subjects tests required to get a GED. She knocked out Science and then Reading & Language Arts. All that remains is Social Studies and Math.

"I knew I would struggle with math," Grace confesses, eyes to the ceiling as if praying for mercy. "I've been out of school for so long; for over 30 years. It's not easy at all," she states. "But the instructors at DAEC are so welcoming and warm. They didn't make me feel out of place. I've been encouraged by them from day one."

Over a year into her journey to complete her education, Grace's ambitions began to grow. "My goals for after I got my GED were really low. I just wanted to get it done and go home and get a job in anything. But that's no longer what I want. I want to do more. I'm leaning towards an LPN or RN. And I'd really like to be a travel nurse."

Grace is already meeting with an AEC career advisor to map out her next steps for college courses. "Now that makes me really nervous!" Grace exclaims. "Just getting a GED has been pretty tough. Taking on college courses feels pretty intimidating. It's not going to be easy."

For anyone considering coming back to finish their education, Grace says, "I would encourage them to do it. The time is now. If I can do it, then I feel like anyone can. And I'm just very grateful to the education center. They're so warm. So helpful. Everybody there is really friendly. They're always encouraging me to do more, to finish. You're almost there. You got this!"

Our **GED program** is the most popular among our students, having enrolled **189** adult learners in 2022.



## 2022 Board of Directors

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## 2022 Benchmarks

**314** total learners served

**278** learners attended our ESL and GED classes

**123** GED tests received passing scores at our Centers and the jail.

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

**89** students representing **16** countries learned English.

**126** individuals received career & support services through the BOOST Program. Additionally, **29** learners were awarded over

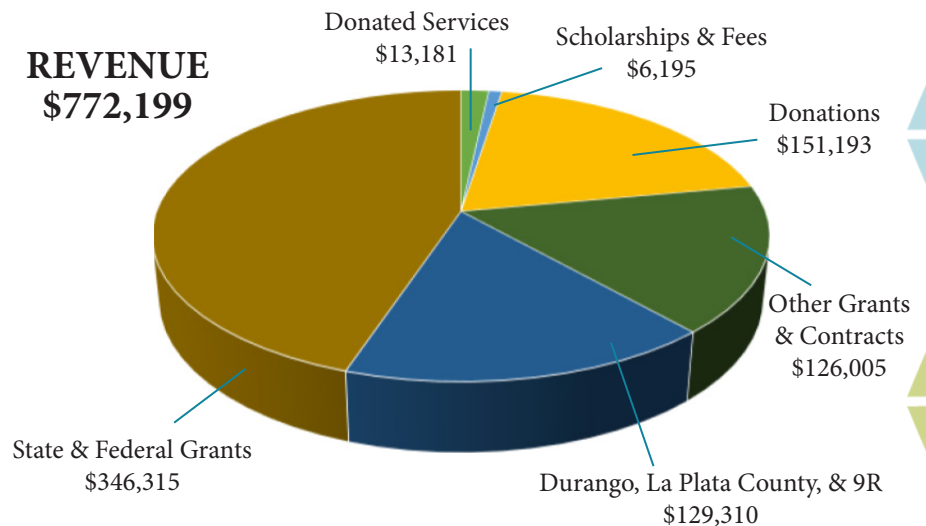
**\$52,000** in scholarships for early childhood education training.

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

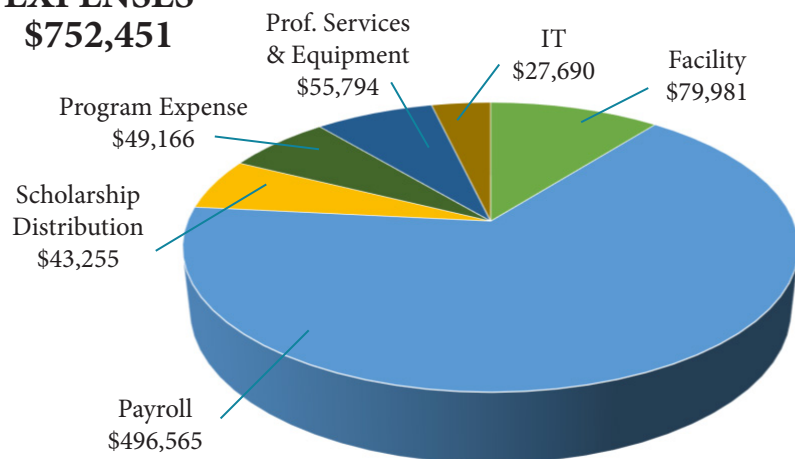
Volunteers donated **531** service hours.

## 2022 Finances

**REVENUE**  
**\$772,199**



**EXPENSES**  
**\$752,451**



# Thank You, 2022 Donors

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## Adult Education Center

*Serving Southwest Colorado*

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

### Upcoming Events

**Wednesday, May 31st, 6:00pm**

Durango HSE Graduation Ceremony  
Durango Rec Center

**Thursday, June 1st, 6:00pm**

Cortez HSE Graduation Ceremony  
Turquoise Raven Art Gallery

**Saturday, June 24th, 8:00am**

The Fast and Curious 5k/10k Fun Run

**Monday, July 3rd**

Summer 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.



**Upcoming Fundraiser:**

**5k/10k Fun Run on June 24th!!**



### Seeking Runners and Volunteers!

Run, walk, or bring the kids! Or sign-up to volunteer!  
Enjoy prizes, vendors, and refreshments! Learn more and  
sign-up at [www.durangoadulted.org/fun-run-event!](http://www.durangoadulted.org/fun-run-event!)

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