

Elizabeth's Story

In January 2014, the GED exam was revised, and the new test was considerably more difficult than the older version. For many of our students, this proved very problematic. Elizabeth enrolled in our Project BEST class in White Settlement, and we began trying to figure out why she was having such a hard time making progress in class. We soon realized that Elizabeth had a host of learning issues that no one had ever recognized. With the right help, she would qualify for accommodations on the new exam. We contacted The Learning Center of North Texas, and our friends there helped identify Elizabeth's specific learning issues. Finally, we began to see the light come on for Elizabeth.



Things were still difficult for Elizabeth. She and her husband have two young children; they were working full time and had bills to pay. As the youngest of 8 children, Elizabeth also had to help care for her elderly parents. Coming to class two nights a week was not easy. When the new GED exam changed at the start of 2014, the passing rate in Texas had dropped by 90% in Texas. Elizabeth wasn't the only student who wasn't passing; we didn't have a single student pass the exam in 2015.

By then, we were all frustrated. We chose to appeal to the State Board of Education for help, and when Tarrant Literacy Coalition decided to take a group of students to Austin for a public hearing with SBOE Board members, Elizabeth was eager to tell her story.

She told of her struggles as a young woman who left school at the end of 7th grade. She spoke of working to raise two children on a tight budget. She talked about the increased cost of the exam and the computer skills required to pass the new GED, which was difficult for her with no computer at home for practice. She spoke of her hopes and dreams for herself and her children. After listening to Elizabeth and the other students, State Board of Education voted to change the way high school equivalency tests are administered in Texas. That change created new opportunities for students like Elizabeth.

As we left that day, a reporter from the *Austin American Statesman* asked to speak to Elizabeth. She had been moved by Elizabeth's story. Within days, the story was picked up on the wire and Elizabeth's photo ran in the front sections of almost every major newspaper in the state!

But the reality was that Elizabeth still had to pass all five sections of that test – math, science, social studies, reading and writing. She continued to come to class each week, bringing her children who sat in a nearby room, doing their homework while *she* worked with Project BEST volunteers on her subjects. It took several more years for Elizabeth to pass all the sub-tests of the high school equivalency exam.

With the community graduation celebration planned for June 2018, Elizabeth took her last test, the writing exam, nearly five years after she had enrolled in our Project BEST program. Elizabeth took the test on a Monday afternoon. A week later, she was notified that she had passed the test. More than two decades after she left school as a young girl, Elizabeth would finally receive her diploma.



At the graduation, Elizabeth's parents sat with tears running down their cheeks. Now 84 years old, they never thought they'd see their youngest daughter walk across the stage. Her large extended family were there with gifts and flowers to help celebrate her special day. The highlight of the evening was seeing her two young children watch their mother accept her diploma. They had been with her at almost every class and now they were there to celebrate this accomplishment.

Just a few weeks ago, Elizabeth let us know that she and her husband had some big news to share. They had just bought their first home! She described it as a "starter home" and said they'd been busy this summer getting it ready for their family. They'll be moving into the house soon.

When we met Elizabeth back in the fall of 2013, we had no idea where her path would take her. It was obvious that she was not a quitter. She stuck with it when many others would have given up. She's a fighter. She knows what she wants and she's willing to work hard to get it.



The students who come to Project BEST are all fighters. They've been through hard times. Most have young children. They all have one thing in common. They want a better life for themselves and their family.

Our supporters of Project BEST help make good things happen for adult learners like Elizabeth. By donating to Tarrant Literacy Coalition, you make it possible for them to overcome incredible odds, to pass a test that is more than 7 hours long and includes a great deal of difficult material. You help them get on track to a better job, to higher education, to a brighter future.