

A New Challenge: Long-time special education teacher finds new inspiration helping older students earn high school diplomas at Ramona Adult School

By Julian Mendoza

Through diligent effort and determination, Maritere Rodriguez Rivera recently gained acceptance to Mesa College. She credits her admission to successfully completing the HiSET program at Escondido Adult School and working diligently to comprehend English through her studies in the English as a Second Language program.

After nearly three decades of teaching special education in K-12 schools, and despite loving her job, Candice Jarman was looking to try something new. Her principal at Ramona's Montecito High School suggested that she teach at Ramona Adult School (RAS)—which is located on the Montecito campus—and she accepted the challenge. Since Fall 2019, she's been helping adult students earn their high school diplomas or equivalency while continuing as a special education program specialist for the Ramona Unified School District.

Jarman says her long experience teaching younger students carries over into teaching adults: "A lot of the adult students were not successful in high school," she says. "It's not that they couldn't do it, they just felt like they never had the right teachers or the right success from my conversations with them."

"The beauty for me is that because I have a special ed background, I understand how to break things down into its simplest form, and then build it back up to its complexity, so that there's a better understanding."

RAS is part of the Education to Career Network (ETCN) of North San Diego County, which also includes Palomar College and adult schools in Vista, Poway, San Marcos and Escondido. These schools offer such programs as English as a second language, high school diploma and equivalency preparation, and Career Technical Education (CTE) training in a variety of fields at no- to low-cost. According to ETCN's website, more than 15



Candice Jarman says she and other instructors at Ramona Adult School strive to remove barriers for busy adults earning their high school diplomas. Photo by Charlie Neuman

thousand students participate in programs and services offered through the network annually.

Jarman says she's moved by how much "heart" her RAS colleagues put into teaching adults, as well as their drive to support those students. As adult students must balance life and education, many are also working, raising families or struggling with language barriers. Staff must be adaptive and compassionate to help students achieve their goals.

Illustrating this, Jarman shares the story of one student—a busy mom with children and a sick parent—for whom attending weekday classes was a barrier. Jarman suggested holding a Saturday session of the course to help that student and others like her.

"She actually took a year off," Jarman says, "and I reached out to her and said, 'Come back and come work with me.' And she did." With the new schedule, the once-

struggling student made it through the class.

Jarman says the rewards of teaching adults are also comparable to teaching younger students.

"It's about just helping them and seeing them grow, whether it's in confidence or academics. And then once they get their diploma, it feels good knowing that their life is changed."



The Education to Career Network (ETCN) of North San Diego County is a consortium of adult education providers that includes Ramona, Escondido, San Marcos, Poway and Vista adult schools, as well as Palomar College. For more information about how ETCN can help you achieve your goals, visit www.educationtocareer.net.