

Escondido Adult School starts students on a path to success

How one student used adult school programs to help launch her dream of pursuing a college degree

By Whip Villarreal

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.

Rivera immigrated to the United States in 2021 from Mexico and has been working hard on her English skills. She was also determined to pursue higher education and acted on ways to transform her goals to reality. This led her to enrolling at EAS to complete the High School Equivalency program so she could pursue a college career. Not only did Rivera graduate from EAS last November, but her English speaking abilities are good enough that some could think she has been speaking English most of her life.

“When I first arrived, I worked hard to understand English during my time in ESL,” explained Rivera. “While studying hard and putting in the long hours, I made the decision to continue my education once I completed my ESL studies and started looking into ways to make that possible. It has not been easy but it has helped me get where I am today.”

Rivera is currently enrolled in Mesa College and has been attending classes since January. She is studying biology and plans to eventually apply to University of California, Davis to focus on animal science.

Despite completing her programs at EAS, she continues to impact the school by volunteering her free time. She was part of the first cohort of the newly implemented Student Ambassador program at EAS and has assisted with the school’s ESL registrations, open houses and even setting up a food drive in December 2023.



Maritere Rodriguez Rivera utilized Escondido adult school programs like Hiset and English as a Second Language to lay the groundwork for a college education. Photo by Charlie Neuman

Rivera continues to volunteer her time for EAS as a volunteer Student Ambassador to support students who are going through similar struggles that she overcame during her journey to transition into college.

“I really like to volunteer my time to help people,” Rivera said. “When I was in Escondido Adult School, I went to a church to help with the food bank and asked my professor if we could do something similar in the school. When the student ambassador program started last April and we went to our initial meetings and planned out events and agendas, that is when planned to host the food drive. It’s nice that I can help students who are going through something similar when I started at Escondido Adult School. I plan on continuing to help volunteer as much as I can to help as many people as I can.”

Rivera’s advice for those looking to pursue higher education or learn another

language at EAS is to work really hard to reach that goal. She emphasized the importance of dedicating time and effort to turn any dream or goal into achievable realities.



To learn more about Escondido Adult School and the programs it offers, escondidoadultschool.org

Transition Students from School to Work

Escondido Adult School Partners with Escondido School District to Transition Students from School to Work

By Nicole Carr

Rahul Chintalapudi and his mother, a trained software engineer, immigrated from India to the United States when Chintalapudi was less than 6 months old. They faced the challenges of settling into a new country, which were further complicated by Chintalapudi's diagnosis of autism and some obstacles to communication and learning.

Finding support and guidance became vital to ensure Chintalapudi's academic progress. The Escondido School District's Orange Glen High School played a pivotal role in providing Chintalapudi with resources and accommodations through specialized programs. Chintalapudi received extensive support tailored to his needs, including tutorial assistance in core subjects like English, math and history. Communication courses were offered as well, ensuring he could successfully complete his studies.

“Ms. Ruhe taught me communication skills that helped me to find work.”

Rahul Chintalapudi, Graduate

Reflecting on his experience, Chintalapudi acknowledges the unwavering support he received from the Orange Glen High School faculty.

“They (Orange Glen faculty) really wanted me to do well, so they referred me to the START Program,” he says.



Escondido school district partners with Escondido Adult School to help transition students like Rahul Chintalapudi from one academic support system to the next. Photo by Charlie Neuman

Escondido School District's START Program emerged as an invaluable tool for Chintalapudi's transition from high school to the workforce. This vocational program provided special needs students with essential life skills and educational training, facilitating a smooth transition to employment.

Under the mentorship of Tanya Ruhe, a dedicated teacher at Escondido Adult School, Chintalapudi received personalized tutoring and counseling, which addressed his unique communication and learning challenges.

“Ms. Ruhe taught me communication skills that helped me to find work,” Chintalapudi says, underscoring the importance of supportive educators in his journey toward independence and self-sufficiency.

Through the concerted efforts of the START Program and the guidance of

mentors like Ms. Ruhe, Chintalapudi successfully secured a job as a food server—a significant milestone in his journey toward self-reliance. However, his ambitions extend beyond his current employment. He aspires to follow his mother's path, to become a software engineer, and pursue a career in computer science.

“My mom studied hard and became a computer engineer, and someday I can too,” Chintalapudi says.



For more information about Escondido Adult School's programs, visit escondidoadultschool.org

ESCONDIDO ADULT SCHOOL

The Path to a Promising Future

By Nicole Carr

Andres Arias's journey from Guadalajara, Mexico, to San Diego was a change of scenery and a pivotal moment in his life. Departing from his hometown at age 10 meant more than just seeking better economic prospects; it meant traveling to the United States to rewrite his story and redefine his future.

The bustling streets of Guadalajara noted Arias's early struggles and sacrifices. Despite his community's rich culture and warmth, economic hardship cast a shadow over his aspirations. The weight of financially supporting his family responsibilities forced Arias to delay his academic goals prematurely, but he never lost sight of his hope to complete his high school education.

Upon his arrival in San Diego, Arias faced a whirlwind of challenges. His hope to find improved employment opportunities clashed with the harsh reality of his limited language skills and lack of formal education. Despite the uncertainty, he embraced every odd job as a chance for growth and every setback as a lesson in resilience.

Following a heart-to-heart conversation with his mother, Arias decided to attend Escondido Adult School. With neither his mother nor his family members having received a formal education, completing his high school education held particular significance for him.

"I want to be a good example for my kids so they can follow in my footsteps and get their high school diplomas," Arias says.



Andres Arias was able to find economic security thanks to gaining his GED through Escondido Adult School.
Photo by Charlie Neuman

Arias' enrollment at Escondido Adult School was a defining moment. He found guidance from Escondido teacher Tanya Ruhe, whose unwavering support breathed new life into his aspirations. With Ruhe's mentorship, Arias embarked on the GED Program.

The GED Program became more than just a curriculum for Arias; it was a bridge from a challenging past to a promising future. Arias learned English, math and other high school subjects. Each lesson learned and milestone achieved served as an indicator of Ruhe's unyielding spirit and determination.

Arias says, "I was so lucky to have found Ms. Ruhe because the GE classes and my personal counseling helped me identify and reach my goals."

As Arias stood on the threshold of his graduation, he reflected on the path that had led him to this moment. His diploma was not only a symbol of personal achievement but a symbol of hope for his children to also pursue their educations.

Upon earning his diploma, Arias set his sights on advancing his career as a manager. He began his career in food service as a cook in various restaurants and entered a management training program to learn restaurant operations. Through his efforts, Arias secured an assistant management position at a local pizza restaurant, with aspirations to become a general manager.

"Hard work and the education that Escondido Adult School provided me gave me a new lease on life," says Arias..



To learn more about Escondido Adult School's programs, visit escondidoadultschool.org

AGENTS OF CHANGE

Escondido Adult School educators bring passion, empathy and joy to classrooms

By Anne Stokes

When her students struggle balancing school, work and family, Maricxa Zendejas knows exactly what they're going through. Today, she's an instructor at Escondido Adult School with 25 years of experience in the medical field, but starting out she was an 18-year-old single mother in need of a career—fast.

"A lot of these students are young parents, single parents, or they've raised a family and they're older. They know I can empathize with them and understand them," she says. "Things get challenging, things get tough. It's easier for them to open up because I've been there."

Polina Trask's English as a Second Language students can also find a kindred spirit in their teacher.

"I always tell my students when I meet them that English is not my native language, that I have first-hand experience learning English as a Second Language and that I'm still learning every day of my life," she says. "I've been here for 17 years, it's been a long time, but I still remember when I first came here. I was acclimating and adapting to a new environment. It took time and patience and an open mind."

Both Zendejas and Trask bring a wealth of lived experience to their classrooms, something invaluable that's hard to find in textbooks. They both also found meaningful teaching careers at Escondido Adult School after not finding the right fit elsewhere. Trask, who was burned out working full-time and wearing several hats at a middle school, says she found it easier to balance life and work with a part-time adult school teaching schedule. Zendejas found adult school to be a more supportive environment for students than the private institution she was teaching at, a priority that better aligned with her own.



Teacher Polina Trask teaches her ESL class as one of Escondido's adult school educators.

"I love seeing the transformation of students. I love seeing how they come in—just like I was at one time—and I love being able to relate to them because I was in their shoes many, many years ago," she says. "I love seeing the transformation, I love seeing their self-esteem build up, learn new skills and then go off to their externships, their jobs, and moving forward."

Another thing both Trask and Zendejas agree on is how enjoyable they find their job, particularly working with their students.

"I love my job for many reasons, but the most enjoyable aspect is probably my students," Trask says. "You have wonderful students who know they want to be here, and they're really committed, they're really grateful, and they're very, very kind. My students honestly take out the 'begudgingly getting out of bed in the morning to go to work' element out of my day because I look forward to seeing my students every day."



Escondido Adult School teacher Maricxa Zendejas at her evening medical assistant class at Del Lago Academy high school. Photos by Charlie Neuman

Zendejas agrees, noting that students who want to be in the classroom make a world of difference for teachers and for themselves.

"They're looking for that change, they're looking for a fast career, they're looking to get their foot in the door at something," Zendejas says. "If anybody is looking into adult education, these adults want to be there, they want to make the change. ... It's really rewarding for me."



To find out more about the opportunities waiting for you at Escondido Adult School, visit www.escondidoadultschool.org or call 760-737-8000 for more information.