

SER Scholarships Offer Hope in Boston's Roxbury

By **BRIAN MARQUES** AUG. 27, 2014

BOSTON – La Alianza Hispana in Roxbury, MA is among the SER-Jobs for Progress National, Inc. (SER National) Affiliates participating in a high school scholarship program under the Clinton Global Initiative (CGI).

SER National and its affiliates have joined this CGI “Commitment to Action” through a consortium of like-minded partners, led by ed2go and Smart Horizons Career Online Education (SHCOE), with the goal of stemming the nation’s high school drop-out crisis among Hispanics, African-Americans, and other vulnerable populations.

But for Adaliz Montanez and Nerily Cruz, a scholarship to complete their high school education means more than just a diploma. It offers the opportunity to take another shot, be given a second chance, and to achieve their dreams. For Adaliz, of Boston’s Jamaica Plain, it became clear that she would not be able to reach her career goals without first completing her high school education.



(L-R) La Alianza Hispana scholarship students Adaliz Montanez and Nerily Cruz.

“I was looking for a GED program to finish high school and I reached out to Rosa Bastian at La Alianza Hispana, who knows my Mom,” said Montanez. “My favorite show is ‘First 48’, I love putting clues together and I want to become a homicide detective.”

What Adaliz found was more than just a GED prep course. Through the program she was awarded a full scholarship to Career Online High School, where she can put her problem-solving skills to good use. Upon completion of her coursework, Adaliz will earn not only an accredited high school diploma, but also become a Certified Protection Officer – a great first step for someone who aspires to go on to college as a criminal justice major.

Overseeing the project locally for La Alianza is Rosa Bastian, whose own teenage son has worked diligently to hone his skills on the baseball diamond, dreaming of receiving an athletic scholarship to play Division I ball at the University of Massachusetts Amherst.

“I see the importance of graduating high school in order to have opportunities in college and beyond. I try to help young people in the community by providing the support and guidance they need, and by instilling the commitment to goals that I have instilled in my own son.”

Adaliz, a self-proclaimed hands-on learner, has benefitted from the flexible course scheduling and multi-level support systems that differentiate the Career Online High School from a traditional classroom environment.

“I work from 6:00 to 1:30 and then go straight to school work,” said Cruz. “I like the online classes because there are less distractions and I know I’ll get one-on-one support to complete my tasks.”

While for Adaliz the balance of work and school is the key to her success in the program, Nerilys Cruz is attempting to reclaim her education as a full-time Mom.

Nerilys, of nearby Roxbury, is a dedicated mother of five, an aspiring actress, and employed as a TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) Coordinator in her community. Originally from Puerto Rico, her plan for success includes improving her English skills, which is how she became connected to La Alianza Hispana and Rosa Bastian.

“I came to La Alianza for their ESL classes. Rosa saw that I am someone who wants to continue taking steps forward,” said Cruz. “For me it is a chance to show myself, and my kids, that I can do it.”

Although Nerilys enjoys working in the community and sees it as a possible career path in the future, she is a performer at heart.

“My passion is acting. I am a professional clown, and I’m a ‘big actress’,” said Cruz. “I hope to go on to college to take acting classes.” With her exceptional time management skills and brimming personality, don’t be surprised to see her on a screen or stage near you in the not-so-distant future.

Behind it all is the wisdom and optimism of Vivian Pera, La Alianza’s Contracts Manager. As an immigrant from Cuba who raised two engineers out of her own children, she knows a thing or two about how to make it in this country – and that *thing* is education.

Said Pera, “From my point of view, because I have been a mother, and because I had to work. I also took classes at night. It would have been so wonderful that instead of me traveling to a university and sitting there and knowing that I was not with my children, to have something like this, where I can sit down in my own time and be able to absorb the information. I am ready at that moment, I choose the time for myself. I think it is a wonderful idea, a wonderful opportunity, and I wish to find more people we can help with these scholarships.”

With this kind of commitment to the denizens of Roxbury and its surrounding communities, there is little doubt that Pera and the team at La Alianza will find more individuals to help make their own dreams become a reality.