

Gaining Education Through Determination (GED)

A Helping Hand for Delinquent and Dependent Minors

Juvenile court can turn a youngster away from crime and violence, but many youths must overcome nearly insurmountable obstacles to maintain a law-abiding life. Earning a high school diploma or the equivalent General Educational Development (GED) certificate can significantly improve a young person's chances of success and satisfaction in work, higher education, and life.

In July 2003, the [Unified Family Court of Yolo](#) started offering individual tutoring in preparation for the GED exam to minors who appeared in juvenile delinquency and dependency actions, some of whom were in county custody.

As the first step of the program, the court identifies minors who won't be graduating from high school. If they want help, they are referred to the court's Gaining Education Through Determination (GED) program. The program is a collaborative effort:

- Family court judges and staff, the public defender, and Child Protective Services all identify and refer potential candidates.
- The instructor, Charlotte Beal, works helping adult offenders prepare for the GED test. She generously volunteers her talents and time to tutor minors, usually one-on-one, for an hour or more a week.
- The program is free to students. Grants pay for study books and test fees. The students are expected to map out their work in the program. If minors in custody are released while their studies are ongoing, they continue in the GED program and consult with Beal on when to take the exam.
- The public library provides a meeting room at no cost.
- The court tracks the students' progress, stays work requirements for them while they are enrolled, and waives the work requirement once they earn their GED certificates.
- A local attorney donates a \$100 cash award to each graduate.
- The court holds a graduation ceremony, celebrated with cake and punch, at which the court, the Yolo Children's Fund, and prominent community members present the program certificate, the cash gift, and offers of support to each graduate.

First in the Program and the Family

The program's first graduate was the first person in his family to earn a diploma or GED certificate outside of prison. He was always early to his appointments and thoroughly prepared. While enrolled, he worked nearly full-time to help support his mother and siblings. Since passing the test, he has continued his education and his support of the family. His goal is to become an air force pilot.

Success to Build On

A family court presiding judge noted that "the minors are not just passing the test but achieving very high scores. Many of these kids had given up on education, and, in the GED program, they realize their hard work yields concrete results. They can succeed academically and in the world."

Impacts

- By May 2005, the program had enrolled 23 students; 3 had taken the GED examination and had passed. The others continue to prepare, except for those who have moved out of the county.
- The students have learned to trust and respect their dedicated tutor and have gained self-esteem from her constant “you can do it” encouragement.
- The program has instilled a sense of responsibility in its students. They are encouraged to set educational and career goals, and they discover how important education is.
- The students learn that the juvenile court system works for the public good, not simply to punish.



Charlotte Beal tutors a teen dependent preparing for the GED exam.

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