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PCLC offers alternative learning options for struggling students

PCLC student John Banks and his mom Jeannette Potami share their journey



A Success Story

By Leslie Heimbaugh - PCLC Development Officer

High school was difficult for John Banks. Although he was not bullied, he could not stand how his fellow students treated each other, and spending day after day in such a toxic environment took a heavy toll. It wasn't as though John couldn't do the work; he just didn't feel like he fit in with his fellow students.

Anxious and frustrated, he knew he could not go on like this for much longer.

John, now 19, took his concerns to his mom Jeannette and stepdad Jason Potami, who were eager to help him in any way they could. They enrolled John in a charter school, but he liked that setting even less. The three decided to give



school one more try, and it went reasonably well until the COVID-19 pandemic hit.

“We were right back to the same Zoom sessions that didn’t work with the charter school,” said Jeanette. “That was the clincher, so I thought, ‘Okay – here’s what we’re going to do.’”

John’s parents recommended that he go to Perry County Literacy Council (PCLC) for classes to earn his high school equivalency diploma.

“My parents thought that I should try it out,” said John. “My mom was worried because she knew that I didn’t always get all my work done in school, but she knew that I cared about getting my diploma – and she had faith in me.”

John loves coming to PCLC. Since entering the program last September, he has completed three of the four tests required to earn his high school equivalency diploma.

“Honestly, [the PCLC staff] are the nicest people ever,” he said. “Not only that, but it’s such a good environment to be around. It’s very nice to be here with people that are going through the same issues. They didn’t like school, either – they didn’t like the classroom environment.”

PCLC instructor Louise Warner says that, while John is already a hard worker, the care and structure that PCLC offered gave him an extra boost.

“He’s really got a place in everyone’s heart here because he’s such a wonderful young man – and yet, he could have been a high school dropout and not had the opportunity [to get his GED] if we hadn’t been here to support him,” said Louise.

She noted that John was quiet and shy when he first started attending classes but is now coming out of his shell. He laughs and jokes with the staff, and he loves working with math tutor Kathy Luckie, a retired PCLC teacher.

“My tutor, Mrs. Luckie, is very helpful,” said John. “She’s on the ball, straight to the point and very understanding. I’m not very good at Math – it’s probably my worst subject. But Mrs. Luckie worked

with inmates at the Perry County Prison, so she knows what people go through. I like that a lot.”

John can envision his future more clearly now, and he hopes to take advantage of the training offered by EDSI – PCLC’s workforce partner.

“I’m into music and hands-on work – stuff like that,” he said. “I’m a person who needs to keep it simple. I want my GED because I know that I have a possibility of getting into electrical, plumbing, or HVAC.”

Jeannette is very pleased with John’s progress. She says it’s incredible seeing how he’s grown and flourished as a person. She is reminded of a time when she needed help, which makes her grateful that PCLC was here for her son.

Eighteen years ago, Jeannette was a single mom with five kids. She was alone and needed to find work as soon as possible. Thankfully, she found a center similar to PCLC, which helped her go to nursing school.

“If those programs weren’t in place – what would I have done?” she said. “I said, ‘What’s the shortest amount of schooling,’ because I needed to get to work!”

Jeannette trained to be a licensed practical nurse (LPN) – a fast option to a meaningful career. She now works at a clinic in Mechanicsburg with people recovering from heroin and opiate addiction.

“I think it’s pretty important to add that programs like [PCLC’s] are crucial,” said Jeannette. “For us, it’s a good thing, but for others who don’t have family support, it’s so important. Thankfully, I no longer need help, but programs like [these] were in place when I needed them.”

John feels supported by everyone at PCLC and would strongly advise people who need help to come and get it.

“If you’re trying to get somewhere, just set your mind to it and know that it isn’t going to happen overnight,” he said. “Even if you fail, mess up, or become unmotivated, you’re a work in progress. As long as you’re living, there’s still hope.”

