

Ashley, a 23-year-old Hartford native, didn't plan to start a family while she was still in high school. But like many of her peers in Hartford, where the teen birth rate is three times the state average, Ashley found herself with a newborn son at the age of sixteen. School had never been easy for Ashley, and becoming a mother only made things more complicated. Although Ashley says she was lucky to have a supportive family, there were not sufficient supports in school for her to balance her responsibilities as a mom with the duties of being a full-time student. Soon, she had no choice but to drop out of high school.

Despite the challenges she faced, Ashley was determined to move forward with her life. "I knew I had to set an example for my son," she says. "If I finish school, he has to finish school, too!" She enrolled in Job Corps, and also took classes with the local public adult education program. However, Ashley says, "I had trouble focusing in larger classes." Then, in 2013, a family member told her about the GED program at LVGH. She decided to give it a try.

"When you step through the doors here, the first thing you see is a smile," Ashley says. "It's a very positive place. Everyone keeps you motivated and takes the time to help you." She noticed that many of her classmates were older adults. "They showed me that it's never too late to change your life and go back to school," she says.

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Working with our staff, Mark and Rose, and with her tutors, Edlyn and Ginger ("I love them," she says), Ashley began preparing diligently for the GED and working on other goals. This past March, she earned her driver's license. She plans to take the GED later this year. And after she reaches that milestone? "I'm going to college," Ashley tells us, without a hint of doubt in her voice. She's interested in studying architecture, and says that the first house she's going to build will be for her mother, who was so supportive of her during tough times. She'd also like to work with youth in her hometown. "I got involved in some things I shouldn't have when I was younger," she says. "I would like to do something to help Hartford kids stay on the right track."

While her life may not have gone as planned, Ashley now feels that she is on the path to success, and is excited about what's to come. "I've learned that you have to have a Plan A and a Plan B, because you never know what will come your way," she says. "Nothing can stop me."



Student Spotlight
Ashley R., *GED student*
Hartford Literacy Center