25 WOMEN

25 Women for 2025: By teaching, passionate advocate Dr. Iris Pendleton uplifts others

Heather Fuselier Special to the Tallahassee Democrat

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As a passionate advocate for domestic violence survivors, Dr. Iris Davis Pendleton has worked tirelessly to raise awareness, provide resources, and create spaces for healing.

By courageously sharing her journey of bravery and survival, she has inspired countless individuals to reclaim their voices and their power, and been named as one of Tallahassee's 25 Women We Need to Know in 2025.

Pendleton arrived in Tallahassee from Blountstown, as a high school senior and graduated from Godby High School, then went on to earn an Associates Degree from Tallahassee Community College and then continued to Florida State University to earn a Bachelor's degree Child Development, Masters degree in Reading and Language Arts Education, and a PhD in Communication Science and Disorders-Early Childhood Education Autism.

"In my heart, I've always wanted to be a teacher," she says. "I used to play like I was teaching my baby dolls or my little brother or little sister, pretty much anybody that would listen to me," she laughs, remembering how she would ask her teachers in school for leftover worksheets that she could bring home for her "students."

Now an assistant professor at Tallahassee State College, Iris teaches early childhood education with a commitment to mentorship. "I teach, encourage, inspire, and

motivate others because my life experiences have given me valuable knowledge that I can pass along to others. I believe the best way to show gratitude for what I've been given is to pay it forward by empowering, supporting, and uplifting others so they can reach their full potential," she says.

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Pendleton's advocacy extends to public speaking, community outreach, and collaboration with organizations focused on supporting survivors of domestic violence, bringing her own lived experiences to the conversation. Her book, "Now I Can Wear Pink," is a testament to her strength and dedication, offering survivors a message of hope, resilience, and empowerment.

"Leaving an abusive relationship was an act of reclaiming my power and self-worth," she said. "Writing and publishing my book allowed me to share my voice and experiences with the world. And above all, triumphing despite life's hardships has shown me my own strength and the importance of resilience."

Beyond her writing, Pendleton has collaborated with organizations, spoken at events, and used her platform to drive meaningful change. As a member of the Council for the Status of Women and Girls and Domestic Violence Coordinating Council, she is motivated by seeing others feel empowered.

"I'm inspired by seeing the growth in others and knowing that I've played a role in their personal journey," she says fondly. "Witnessing someone gain confidence, develop new skills, and overcome challenges reminds me why I do what I do. It's incredibly rewarding to be a part of their success and transformation."

Her voice extends beyond advocacy and towards the stage. "I love expressing myself through spoken word poetry and dancing. It's a way to release emotions and tell a story," she says. The sense of community in Tallahassee keeps her grounded and connected to the city. "I love how no matter where I go, I always run into someone familiar. It's comforting to be part of a place where connections are strong, and people genuinely care about each other."

The care and passion that Iris has for others are the foundation of her work, advocacy, and message, and that stems from a strong spiritual base.

"Without God, I truly believe I wouldn't have been able to overcome many of the challenges I've faced," she says. "I am incredibly grateful for all I've accomplished so far, and I am confident that with God's continued support, I will be able to achieve even more in the future. My faith has given me resilience and perspective, which I carry into everything I do."