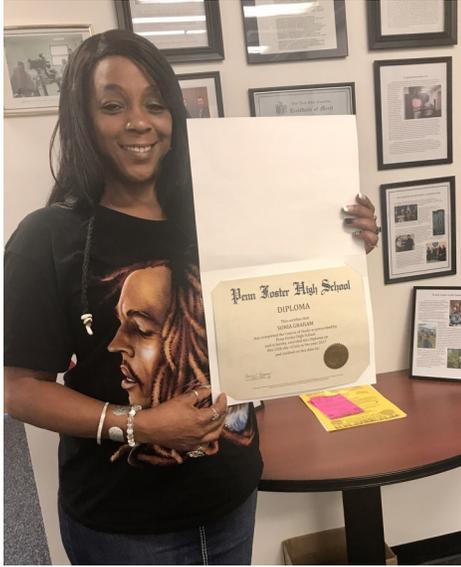


## Congratulations to a 2017 High School Graduate



Sonia Graham is an Albany Housing Authority resident who has traveled a long road to reach her most recent success. Like many women having children at a young age, Sonia left high school to be a mother. Regarding leaving school without a diploma, she says, “I always knew I had to go back and get it. I cried when I had to drop out.”

When Sonia started the full-time computer and employment class with The WAGE Center (then known as Community Technology Initiative) more than 15 years ago, she began to realize that, “when you don’t have a high school diploma, you can’t get a good job—even a waitress job.” After exhaustively searching, she says, “It kept me between a rock and a hard place.”

After being out of school for so long, Sonia began classes and tutoring at The WAGE Center in fits and starts, but couldn’t pass the math section of the General Equivalency Diploma (GED) exam. She says, “I couldn’t get around it. I always wanted the diploma. I took the GED [several times] thinking it was a quicker way. Then, I came across Penn Foster in 2013.”

Sonia cites the importance of the resources at The WAGE Center such as, “use of computers, the looking up of information, copying” and general support of staff who were encouraging throughout her studies. Of The WAGE Center, she says, “When you have low income, when you need certain things, The WAGE Center was a blessing. You all [were] here.”

Sonia kept working at the online courses even though “life happened.” The process took a while because Sonia reconnected with her daughter who was finishing college and going into the Air Force. She says, “I didn’t really think about the study, until I got into it.” After passing Physical Science in July, 2017, she was notified that she would finally receive her high school diploma.

Unfortunately, since 2004, Sonia hasn’t had a valid non-drivers I.D. Working with The WAGE Center, Sonia has been searching for birth records. She remains positive about her future saying, “Whether or not I find my birth [records], I’m going to continue my education.”

Without identification, getting employed is currently not possible. But Sonia hopes to “maybe help others in my position. Or, God put it in my mind - maybe I can start my own business.” Sonia enjoys writing and has always thought of pursuing accounting in college. So, she is currently investigating the Excelsior Scholarship offered through New York State for tuition-free diploma programs.

Sonia’s story is one of perseverance. She talks about how “life threw a curveball” and the many obstacles to success. But, she is proof that steady progress, even if slow, can result in a goal achievement. With her high school diploma in hand, new doors have begun to open along with new hope for future success built on a major step forward.