

Achieving Self-Sufficiency Through Work and Education



Nearly five years ago, Nija Leonard was at the WAGE Center looking to find a job. At the time, she says, “I had no car. I had no job.” She was lacking “basically all the things I wanted.”

Nija learned about the Family Self Sufficiency program as she began to get serious about working. She decided to get signed up because, “it was an encouragement to go to work - like a reward.”

Fast forward and she is now working at Dunkin Donuts (a job she drives to in the car she was able to buy) and was present when an emergency situation occurred. A car smashed through the building and came right at two totally unsuspecting customers. Nija immediately sprang into action. She says, “I saw the lady coming. There were two girls sitting by the window. We had to help the girl out from under the car.” Nija called 911 and rushed to assist despite being “five and a half/six months pregnant.”

While Nija has been working at Dunkin Donuts for some time, she wants to work on goal number three in the FSS program: Getting a GED. She knows it’s necessary to “get better job opportunities.” So, she has begun a GED tutoring program at the WAGE Center.

As for her experience with FSS, Nija says, “It has opened up opportunities: Money-wise, career-wise” and now with tutoring. When she is able to graduate from the FSS program with her escrow money from working, she plans to “save it and leave it.” She is beginning to look at the possibility of homeownership and toward that end is working on “building my credit back up.”

When Nija looks forward another five years, she says she, “sees success if I continue doing what I’m doing.” Getting a GED would open different career possibilities in nursing, engineering, working with troubled youth and “giving back.”

For now, she is studying for her GED, working and caring for a newborn along with her other children for whom she is looking to provide a better life. Just because the FSS program is coming to an end, Nija doesn’t plan to stop accomplishing goals, having already earned escrow money and purchasing a car. Take it from Nija: All of this is possible for those who keep working and achieving small milestones along the way.