

A Bright Flower Arose From Few Gardens



LaConya Thorpe, a 32 year old single pregnant mother of one young son on welfare, visited and toured the CET – Durham, NC center in August 2000. Even though her only prior work experience had been in customer service, she was very interested in the health field. Through the Work First Durham program, LaConya enrolled in the Medical Insurance Billing course instructed at the time by Ms. Deidre Gause. Under the able tutelage of Ms. ‘Dee’, an extremely professional, educated, and experienced medical administrator, LaConya progressed nicely through all of the initial course competencies as she was a high school graduate. She learned the material very quickly and was able to serve as an assistant in the classroom to help others. She also was elected by her class to participate on CET’s Student Council. However, during her final months at CET, LaConya lost her baby as it was stillborn. But this determined and motivated student, supported by her CET instructor/advisor, the CET staff and her family, soon bounced back to complete her studies and graduate. Continued good news came as a result of her marriage prior to her graduation from CET in November 2000.

But that is only half of LaConya’s successful journey. Immediately following graduation from CET, her instructor, Ms. Dee, – doubling as a job developer at CET – helped LaConya get her initial training related job at Wellpath Community Health Services. Her starting salary in 2000 was \$23,000 a year plus benefits. However, after about one year, her employer phased out her division so LaConya turned to her CET – Durham family for job placement assistance. Once again, her previous instructor, Dee Gause, helped LaConya land an even better job at Blue Cross/ Blue Shield (BCBS) of North Carolina. In September of 2001 LaConya was hired as a Customer Service Specialist II at BCBS earning \$28,000 a year!

Over the ensuing years, LaConya performed at an exemplary level and was promoted first to Business Analyst for the Process Team for Insured Claims, and then to Business Unit Coordinator in the Commercial and Government Operations division in 2005. She was now making \$20 per hour or over \$40,000 a year! She is also in a position where she is allowed to work from home. As if this wonderful career progress were not enough, LaConya recently notified CET of an even more, well-deserved good fortune! As a result of her outstanding performance, LaConya’s department head nominated her for a special Chief Executive Officer Award that BCBS acknowledges their best employees with annually. LaConya and CET-Durham, NC are happy to announce that she has just received this prestigious Award along with a cash bonus of \$25,000! And this is in addition to her regular yearly Blue Reward bonuses totaling over \$6,000 a year!

LaConya came to CET from an infamous area housing project known as *Few Gardens*. There were several students from her neighborhood who attended school but had dropped out. The idea of quitting never entered LaConya’s mind, she always wanted more! Although surrounded by the decay of the delapidated area she lived in, she was determined to rise above it. CET gave her the open door to the future she desired. In fact, *Few Gardens* was so notorious that it has since been razed through a HUD HOPE VI grant and is being replaced with mixed-income housing.

According to Ms. Dee; “LaConya is a sure sign of what CET offers in Durham, as well as nationally.” LaConya is also a reminder to the CET staff as well as the student, of how

far we can all go in life with a little direction, instruction, and an earnest desire to achieve. In her own words, LaConya stated: “CET helped me to discover what I wanted to do in life. Meeting Dee was the best asset. She helped me and guided me to the road of success. She still mentors me and encourages me when I am down. She keeps me motivated. With my job I am able to use the coding skills I learned at CET weekly.”

This is a student who would listen to everything her instructor/advisor told her, not only concerning the curriculum, but in her ability to achieve. She believed that what looked impossible to her at that time was truly possible. She took the advice given concerning appropriate dress, interviewing tips, and building her skills in as many areas as possible to become a “triple treat” and an indispensable contributor to her company. In a nutshell, she simply took the information and followed it. CET was a blueprint for success. She has truly enriched her bank account and self esteem in the process!

Postscript: A photo of LaConya Thorpe is prominently featured at the top of a BlueCross BlueShield of North Carolina promotion poster which has been distributed throughout the State.