

## Stories from the Middle College

What if there were no Middle College at Reynolds? Middle College graduate Sherika says before she came to Reynolds to earn her GED, “I didn’t have a job. I was on public assistance. We were bringing in \$600 a month and spending \$800 a month with 3 little kids.” Not only did Sherika earn her GED through the Reynolds Middle College, she went on to successfully take college classes at Reynolds. At a Middle College Forum in October, Sherika told students now enrolled in the program, “Last year I made \$41,000 and social services told me I no longer qualify for assistance. That made a big difference to me. When my children grow up they’ll want to do better and they won’t settle.”

Middle College graduate Lawrence says before coming to Reynolds, “I’d been just wandering around, not even considering a future when my cousin told me about the Middle College. I figured I’d just get my GED. But the program pushed me. I was just thinking GED but they were talking to me about college and better opportunities. Today Lawrence works at the Middle College and is pursuing a degree in sociology.

Mohammad, also a Middle College graduate, says if it were not for Reynolds, “I would be incarcerated right now because I was running rugged. I appreciate the opportunity to come into Middle College because I did a complete 180.” Mohammad is studying electronic engineering at Reynolds while working at Best Buy. “I didn’t finish high school for personal reasons,” says Mohammad. He says, “My college classes are hard ... nothing like high school...it’s a lot of hard work and dedication. But I’m going to be an electronic engineer.” The hardest part of earning his success? Mohammad says, “It’s just coming in every day and showing up.”

Laneisha is a work study student in the biology lab, studying to become an RN. But before coming to Reynolds, Laneisha says she was interested in other things besides school and quit high school. After her son was born, she wanted to be a role model for him so she came to the Middle College. “When I first took a test, my scores were really low. But the women who run the Middle College were just like moms to me. When I finished studying I did get my GED and now I’m a full time college student. I juggle my family and working...it’s hard but through the Middle College teachers and this program, I’ve seen a lot of improvement. Now I tell my friends, ‘I graduated from the Middle College!’”

Middle College grad Anthony works at Carver Elementary School and Richmond Dairy. Before coming to the Middle College, Anthony says, “I was born here but I wasn’t doing nothing at all...just standing on the side attempting to become part of things. I wasn’t looking forward to anything. I wasn’t doing anything. I took my GED in the spring and my scores weren’t high enough because I was still messing around. I worked through the summer and passed. They asked me what I wanted to do, I said teach sixth graders. Everyone has

helped me out. Now I work two jobs to support my two little girls and I'm going to school to get my degree."

The Middle College program is a Virginia Community College System initiative designed to offer a college opportunity to individuals between 18 and 24 who have not completed high school.

This college recovery program is designed for those individuals who have had a desire to pursue college coursework, but need to attain a GED certificate first. The Middle College has worked with 299 students since 2003, serving about 100 students each year. Last year, there were 600 applicants and the college could only serve 100. Currently, 43 students are enrolled in the Fall program.