

How Norma Viveros' Positive Outlook, Strong Support System Pushes Her Drive Forward

Norma Viveros wears a lot of hats.

To her students at Victoria Elementary in San Bernardino, she's known as Ms. Norma. At home, she's mom. At Crafton Hills College, she's a proud graduate of the Class of 2022.

The San Bernardino woman was one of more than a thousand to celebrate their educational accomplishments during a campus-wide commencement ceremony on May 25. But her path to receiving an associate degree in early childhood development was not always easy, but one that was etched when presented with a challenge.

"I was working as a campus monitor at Victoria and there was a teacher who told my son that he was going to 'end up like his mother.' I didn't like that," explained the 46-year-old. "The neighborhood I live in is not in the best area, but it is just home to me, and I didn't like (my son) looking at me and saying, 'I'm not going to graduate.' So, I made it my mission to get my diploma and show him that if his mom could do it, he could do it."

Looking also to prove the doubters wrong, Viveros enrolled at Redlands Adult School to earn her high school diploma. After crushing that goal, she began her Crafton journey and has plans to continue her studies at Cal State San Bernardino in the fall.

"Never in my wildest dreams did I think I'd get my high school diploma," she said with a chuckle. "I asked (staff) at Redlands Adult School 'what's next.' And they replied, 'What about college?' I was 45 years old at the time. How am I supposed to go to college – that's for young kids. There's no way."

At the encouragement of RAS officials, Viveros registered for Crafton's Summer Bridge Program, a five-week course that helps students from Redlands and Yucaipa adult schools transition into college. She then tried taking two classes and then more until she ended up graduating with her AA.

Balancing it all – work, home, and school – was tricky, but Viveros credits her strong support system, which includes her four children ages 26, 22, 17 and 14, for cheering her on, even if it meant missing family occasions.

And as she continues to make her goals a reality, Viveros knows that support will continue, which is a huge motivational boost. Another reason: she wants to set a positive example for the students of Victoria and those who live in the same San Bernardino neighborhood.

"My plan is to get my master's in counseling and encourage 'my kids' to stay in school and help them be productive because I believe if we keep our kids busy, you won't have them running these streets," Viveros explained.

"I'm the first in my family to graduate from college. I've been through some crazy things in life, but no matter what I'm doing no one knows what I'm going through because I'm always smiling. I'm not a victim. I'm a survivor. And when you put a challenge in front of me, I'm going to run with it."

The Adult Education Program is a partnership between the community college and the local adult schools provided by the California Adult Education Program and the Inland Adult Education Consortium. The

program aims to facilitate the transition between adult school and college by providing adults with resources to advance their career and education to improve their overall quality of life.

For more information, visit <https://www.craftonhills.edu/adult-education-program/index.php>

Photo: Norma Viveros, Redlands Adult School and Crafton Hills College Graduate