



**"I REALLY WASN'T THERE TO JUST PASS MY GED;  
I WANTED TO REALLY LEARN."**

At SSND Educational Center, we love to keep up with the journeys of our alumni! Recently, we caught up with Ngozi Okpako, a June graduate, to hear about her experiences and the exciting path she's forged since her time here.

**SSND: *What was your childhood and education like in Nigeria?***

**NGOZI:** I grew up in Enugu City, Nigeria, and had a happy, free, and wonderful childhood. Though I grew up in a poor neighborhood in what is called a public yard, each room housed a family with not less than 7 to 8 people and we had fun times playing and doing things together.

I remember in 1976 when I was about 5 or 6 years old it was time for school registration. In those days being able to attend school was determined by whether your hands could reach your ear from over the top of your head. I wasn't able to yet, so I had to make it reach by slanting my arm backwards over my head! I was accepted anyway. I loved going to school where I mostly learned to read, but had to leave school due to ill health.

**SSND: *Why and when did you come to America?***

**NGOZI:** I came to America in 2022 because I wanted an opportunity for a better life for myself and family because Nigeria was becoming unbearable.

**SSND: *How did you find out about our Center?***

**NGOZI:** In October 2023 my husband sent me a screenshot of the Center's advertisement. According to the post, the registration deadline had passed. But he encouraged me to go anyway and try, which I did, and met Sister Cathy, the Curriculum Coordinator, and she is absolutely the best! They are all amazing, and we had the most wonderful people in our class. We were like family and looked for one another. I really miss my class and teachers.



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**"AS A CHRISTIAN I'M TRAINED TO BELIEVE THAT ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE. I BELIEVE IN MYSELF. AS THE BIBLE SAYS "I CAN DO ALL THINGS THROUGH CHRIST WHO STRENGTHENS ME"**

**SSND: *What did it feel like to pass your classes and receive your GED after less than a year?***

**NGOZI:** I was determined to make it though it wasn't easy at first, but I faced my studies squarely and I listened attentively to my teachers. I really wasn't there to just pass my GED, I wanted to really learn. And so I always try to understand a problem and figure out how to tackle it. I also studied on my own at home and finally was able to get my GED in May 2023. It was 7 months of classes and studying and it was unbelievable, but exhilarating.

**SSND: *What have you done to further your education and/or career since you completed your classes in June 2024?***

**NGOZI:** After getting my GED I registered with CUNY for their Certified Nursing Assistant classes this fall. I just had my last classroom work on November 8 and will be starting my clinicals on November 16. I plan to take my state exam at the end of the clinicals next year.

**SSND: *What is your faith and how does it affect how you have approached your education at this point?***

**NGOZI:** As a Christian I'm trained to believe that all things are possible. I believe in myself. As the bible says "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." It is impossible for anyone to move forward if they are already defeated without even trying.

**SSND: *What is your advice for students just starting on their GED journey?***

**NGOZI:** I want to encourage anyone who wants to get their GED and tell them that there is nothing you cannot achieve if you desire. When you tell yourself "I can't," you defeat yourself. You can, really, you can make it! **Work hard, be determined to make it, and you will. God bless.**