



HOMELAND SECURITY CAREER CERTIFICATE ENABLES SMART HORIZONS CAREER ONLINE EDUCATION GRADUATE TO LAUNCH NEW CAREER

Deanna Boersma dropped out of high school in 2002. Today, she has her dream job, bought her own house, and has enrolled in college. How did she get there?

As a high school dropout and single mom raising a son, it wasn't easy. But the decision to drop out plagued her for years, and it limited her ability to get ahead in a career or in life.

By 2010, she had had enough. "I wanted something better for myself and for my son," said Deanna. "I didn't want to keep living paycheck to paycheck."

She knew the first step was graduating from high school. "In this economy, you have to have a diploma to get a decent job," she said. Plus, her then employer Taco Bell required a high school diploma for promotion to management. Deanna tried going the GED route. But while caring for her son and working full-time, she just couldn't handle the program, which required 2 ½ hours in a classroom a day.

One day, Deanna was getting her oil changed when she saw an ad for Smart Horizons Career Online Education. "Earn your AdvancEd/SACS-accredited high school diploma online," the ad said. "Flexible, affordable, convenient, supportive." Deanna wrote down the number and made the call. "I said to myself, 'this is what I've been waiting for;' I felt like I actually had a chance again."

She saw her chance and she took it. By the following week, Deanna had enrolled in the Homeland Security program. She had always wanted to be a corrections officer and was thrilled to find a program in a related industry. Because the program was online, she was able to balance school with her other job and life responsibilities.

"With Smart Horizons, I was able to do the coursework from home with my son, after he went to sleep or while he was doing other activities," she said. "I would get off work, pick him up from school, and help him with his homework while I did mine. It was just so much easier. Being online 8 hours a week was a lot easier than having to go to work for 8 hours a day, barely see my child, and then have to go to school for 4 or 5 hours at night."

She credits the program with changing her life.

"I feel great. The program allowed me to get the education I needed to pursue the job that I always wanted and set me up for success. I was finally able to answer 'yes' on a job application when they asked if I graduated high school. As a result of my diploma, I was able to earn more money, get good benefits, and buy a house."

In her career certificate coursework, Deanna even learned specific skills that she uses in her job as a corrections officer today, such as writing an incident report.

Deanna also praised the school's support staff for going above and beyond to help her succeed in the program.

"My academic advisor didn't judge me," said Deanna. "She was there for me every time I had a question. When I had a hard time with the course, she helped me find resources. The coaches understand that we can't put our lives on hold to get an education, and they worked hard for us. They are really nice—they notice you and recognize you. It's an amazing feeling."

Smart Horizons recently announced a partnership with Taco Bell—where Deanna was employed when she enrolled in the program—to provide scholarships to enable Taco Bell employees to complete high school. Deanna hopes it affords other employees the same advantages it gave her.

"To those employees that are just like I was, who don't have anything going for them but who want to make something of themselves, I say, 'Go for it, fight for it,'" said Deanna. "Fight for something that will help you build a life for yourself and show yourself—not just other people—that you are actually worth something. You can do this. I was nervous and scared and always upset with myself thinking that I never was going to get my diploma but I worked so hard and I actually got it. Go for it."