

A YEAR OF LEARNING

By **Ryann Mitchell**
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The year 2020 was a year unlike any other. It taught us the importance of faith, priorities, and community. Thankfully, students at The Learning Center were able to foster each of those ideals, in spite of the hardships of the year. Despite the shutdown, we celebrated as two students made professions of faith and were baptized last year. The good news continued as we hosted more Bible Study classes than ever before in the fall semester. As a result, the Gospel was shared with all of our students, many of whom currently claim no religion or claim another religion. Bible Study instructors told us about the multiple conversations with students where they could see the Gospel being planted and, Lord willing, taking root in their hearts.

Our students also came to class in 2020 in a new way. We reformatted our class structure so students only came to The Learning Center one day a week instead of three. Each student was given access to online tools like virtual classrooms, Zoom meetings, and online curriculum. The logistics of getting everyone in the building safely were not easy, but we found that trying to get everyone on the same page digitally was even harder. Nonetheless, the students proved that they have the drive to do the hard work. They persevered and, as a result, we had six sections of the GED passed between August and December. Our students didn't let a different class structure, the need for new technology, or even a global pandemic lessen the importance of this priority in their lives.

One of the six GED sections was passed by a student who had every excuse to quit. She had taken classes with us several times before but usually dropped out halfway through the semester. It was her pattern. In addition, she had failed this section of the GED four times already, always passing her practice tests but unable to overcome the anxiety when the actual test was in front of her. This student had to walk 3.5 miles to get to class and then 3.5 miles to get back home. Basically, all the odds were stacked against her, but she said she wanted it and she didn't want to give up because she knew she could do it.

We did our best to encourage her and teach her and help her work through her mindset as she took her tests. I watched her tremble with joy as tears rolled down her face when she found out she had passed her first section of the GED. It was something she has wanted for so many years and was a hurdle that she just couldn't quite get over. To see her prioritize her studies and to make it happen gave all of us such joy and for me personally, pride beyond compare.



The experience of going to school as an adult is unique. It's something you don't fully understand until you've lived it. In 2020, we saw how the students have become one another's community. They've built bonds with each other. They pray together and share encouragement in both good and bad times. They keep in touch with each other outside of class. Seeing them work together and support one another the way they do, especially during the craziness of 2020, was such a huge blessing that I will always be thankful for.

Overall, we had five students graduate in 2020 and had twelve sections of the GED passed. We saw students improve their grade level understanding by an average of more than one grade level in just twelve weeks. (That's nine months of progress in three months.) We watched as two of our graduates, Susan and Katie, walked across the stage and received their diplomas. We are grateful for the opportunity to serve our students. They are touching the lives of our staff and volunteers in ways we could not have imagined when we opened our doors four years ago. Mostly, though, we look forward to seeing what all of our students will accomplish and how the Lord will move in 2021.



Ryann Mitchell serves as the Program Manager at The Learning Center. She loves working in a ministry with so many eager students and equally-eager, servant-hearted volunteers. She and her husband, Will, spend their free time wrangling their two daughters, Olivia and Elizabeth.