

“Life is beautiful, just apply yourself!”

Beverly Simms



The instant warmth and quick smile are what hit you first when you meet Beverly Simms. She focuses on the positive, works hard, and, not surprisingly, is succeeding in meeting her goals. This recent Academy of Hope graduate is definitely moving forward, enjoying helping others, and improving herself as she goes.

Early Years

Beverly grew up in a loving household with her two parents, four brothers, and two sisters. As her father was in the military, the family moved often. Born in Florida in 1958, Beverly started school in Washington, DC, moved to California where she attended two different schools, relocated to Maryland and then back to California. When the family returned to DC and Beverly entered junior high school in South East, she found the environment rowdy and unfriendly. She was bullied, skipped a lot of school, and started getting poor grades. Fortunately, her mother had her transferred to Taft Junior High School in North East, closer to her home, where things improved. Beverly was happy to repeat 9th grade, had friends, and “did great academically”. But she describes herself as an “adventurous adolescent, not bad, but often caught out” by her strict mother. When she entered McKinley Technical High School she says her grades were “good enough”, but in 12th grade she began to party and smoke grass and things just “started going down hill”. When she realized that she was needed an additional 1.5 credits to graduate, Beverly dropped out.

The World of Work

From that point on, Beverly has held down a long list of jobs, often working two jobs at a time, taking off only briefly when her two children were small. She started as a cashier at Peoples Drug Store,

where she did well due to her positive attitude and responsive customer service. She also worked at China Closet, eventually becoming a department head, as well as at Safeway and the Sheraton Hotel in NW. In 1979 she had her daughter and, thirteen years later, her son. By 1998 Beverly went to work doing community relations in her housing complex and took on seasonal work at the Post Office. During these years she came briefly to the Academy of Hope to try to get her high school credential, but didn't follow up as she needed more time to raise her family. But she later went to work as a team leader for the Consumer Health Access Team, took some time out to stay home to help her son with some problems he was having in school, and then returned to work at World Market. In 2005 she returned to AoH but quickly dropped out again. Nonetheless, she succeeded in seeing both her children graduate from high school.

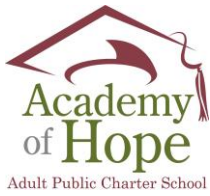
Finally Back to School

Then in 2011, while working at the Wounded Warriors Café in Bethesda, Beverly became very sick and had to be hospitalized. Her health challenges were the cause of "some dark moments" in her life. But it was following this tough period that she was finally able to return to Academy of Hope in September 2012. She says "it's about me now, it was my time". Though a bit surprised that she was able to stay focused on the work, she was eager to learn and felt that "it just came so natural". She was also fortunate to have the support of her two children, who took care of the household so that Beverly had the time she needed to study. The only real challenge was math, so she is planning "to brush up further" in order to eventually enter college.

During her time at AoH she just "kept on moving forward" and in June 2014 Beverly graduated with her NEDP. In thinking about her experience at Academy of Hope, she particularly liked the staff, saying that they "give you hope and are willing to work with you at any level". She also appreciated the fact that "they put in the time to care for people". Overall she found that this is "a place that makes you want to learn, to go to another level. I never felt during the two years that I wanted to stop!" Following graduation she undertook the 13-week Bridge program, during which she missed only one day, as she "just loved being here".

Graduation and Beyond

Due to her own initiative and creativity, Beverly is now working at a job of her own making. Seeing a need to connect AoH students to an array of social services, she proposed to Academy of Hope the position of Student Navigator. Her proposal became a reality when she was accepted as a Public Allies DC fellow and placed at AoH. She loves being able to help students by making connections and establishing institutional relationships with groups such as *Dress for Success*, *Martha's Table*, and *Foundry United Methodist Church*. Due to her work, AoH can now make referrals to these and other services, acting in the place of a case manager. She also greatly enjoys inspiring and encouraging students, letting them know that "it gets better, easier, that there are so many opportunities." She believes it's important to "lift people up and to make them feel good about what they are doing." Overall, she says: "this is something I love doing".



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Beyond spending Monday-Thursday working at AoH, Beverly does training in leadership and community organization with Public Allies on Fridays and works with her Streetwise Mentor on Wednesday evenings. She is also a Public Allies volunteer on holidays and weekends. Her short-term goal is to draw on her growing network of contacts to become an event planner and, later, to obtain a BA in business management. Her longer-term goal is to become an “extraordinary customer service trainer” and to purchase her own home. Though she says that it has all “been challenging, it has also been easy as a result of all my learning.”

We would like to thank Jan Leno for volunteering her time and skills toward putting these stories together.

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