

## OUR COMMUNITY

Meet Annette Banks from Academy of Hope Adult Public Charter School in Washington, DC. Academy of Hope (AoH) was founded in 1985 by two teachers who believed that education could empower those most marginalized. They started out with four students and four GED books in the guardroom of an apartment building! In 2014, AoH transitioned from a community based organization to an adult public charter school and now has two sites. They serve adults 18 and older from throughout the District of Columbia, providing a quality education and preparation for a high school diploma through the GED exam or the National External Diploma Program. AoH integrates these programs with computer literacy, career counseling, college preparation, and career pathways programs with job training in Office Administration and Healthcare. They also provide wraparound services, as well as college navigation and job placement. In the school year 2019-20—their sixth year of operations under charter status—they served close to 700 students. In 2020, AoH also celebrated its 35th year in adult education. Annette just celebrated her 21<sup>st</sup> year in the NEDP and her 25<sup>th</sup> year at AoH!



### **What drives you to do what you do?**

*When I was in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade, my algebra teacher asked me to tutor the mother of one of my classmates. She was preparing to take the exam to become a registered nurse. Even as a young teen, I was moved by the hope in her eyes and voice, when she talked about how passing that test was going to change her life. It dawned on me only recently that that was my first experience in adult education! I was hooked! Part of Academy of Hope's founding vision states that, "Academy of Hope will be a school in which the main course will not be reading, writing, or math, but HOPE". It is being a part of that HOPE that drives me.*

### **Tell us about a memorable experience you had with a client**

*My favorite memories are when graduates return and express how AoH and the NEDP changed, and in some cases saved, their lives. I recently heard from a young woman who graduated eight years ago. She had four children ranging in age from three years to thirteen years. Her husband was abusive and she made the difficult, but courageous, decision to take her children and leave. She had to sleep in her car with her children that first night. She was embarrassed, but she reluctantly told me what was going on. I was honored that she trusted me. Our counselor was able to find safe housing for her and her family. Her obstinate continuance of embracing learning and completing the NEDP in spite of the enormous obstacles she faced, was inspirational. She was the student speaker at her graduation and shared her story. She recently emailed me, effusing information about her and her children. Her oldest is a freshman in Morehouse majoring in Biology. One of her daughters, who is a sophomore in high school, is in the National Honor Society. Her second daughter, in the seventh grade, writes for her school newspaper and with her mom's help is writing her first children's book. The three year old is now 11, and in his last year in elementary school. He is on the student council, in the chess club and the philosophy circle. All of her children are attending prestigious schools on academic scholarships. She is the Finance Manager at a non-profit where she has worked for 7 years. She is a steward in her union and is being considered for a VP of Stewards role within the larger union. She is an "against all odds" story! I will always be deeply moved and inspired by her courage and tenacity and will never forget this young woman.*



***Any tips or best practices you would like to share?***

*Be patient and trust the process. We have all heard the adage, "Patience is a virtue." I think the most important quality that an Advisor/Assessor needs is patience. As strong Advisors/Assessors, we have to be very patient with our clients when we have to deal with the same questions, problems, and complaints over and over again. We must never give up on our clients and should try out new approaches to help them succeed in the NEDP.*

*Trust the process. The NEDP works. By maintaining the reliability and validity of the NEDP, we better serve our clients. I remind my clients when they complain about having to correct a competency more than once, that the NEDP is a learning program, and that I want them to leave with the skills to ensure their continued growth and success. My graduates that complained the loudest come back with the biggest THANK YOUs!*

***Any personal tidbits that you would like to share?***

*I am semi-retired. In preparation for my full retirement, I am going to take piano lessons and purchase a baby grand piano.*

Thank you Annette sharing your HOPE with us. Your client story is so moving, we rejoice in her and her children's accomplishments. And we look forward to hearing about your first piano recital! 😊

Please let me know if you are interested in sharing your story at [cflagg@casas.org](mailto:cflagg@casas.org).