

FACES OF FAMILY CENTERS: Claudia Escalante

Claudia Escalante discovered she was pregnant when she was a high school sophomore. While she always had dreams of being the first in her family to attend college, Claudia was forced to leave school to focus on raising her newborn daughter. She took sporadic courses in an effort to finish high school, but the challenges of motherhood coupled with the fact she needed to find steady work put her education goals on the back burner.

Without a high school diploma, Claudia had trouble finding the administrative assistant job she wanted. “I felt like I was stuck,” she said. “I knew I could be successful in a professional setting, but no one would give me a chance because I didn’t graduate high school.”

Frustrated with only working odd jobs, Claudia turned to the **Reaching Independence Through Employment (RITE)** program for help. Under the guidance of her RITE coordinator, Claudia quickly put together a plan that allowed her to return to school while keeping the dry cleaner job she held for several months. She also learned how to “market” herself to prospective employers using an effective resume, cover letter and interview skills.

In April, Claudia was chosen to participate in RITE’s annual Job Readiness Day at **Crane Co.’s** headquarters in Stamford. Along with four other hand-picked RITE participants, Claudia gained invaluable insight into what it’s like to work at one of the country’s top corporations.

Shortly after the enriching experience at the Crane Job Readiness Day, Claudia was given the opportunity she was waiting for. She applied to an ad on Craig’s List for an administrative opening at a landscaping business in Cos Cob. The company’s executives were so impressed with Claudia’s resume and presence that they hired her on the spot.



But even though Claudia has found the job she’s always wanted, her work continues with the RITE program. In June, she earned her high school diploma from Stamford Adult Education and just enrolled in fall courses at Norwalk Community College. Unaware of how to apply for financial aid, Claudia relied on her RITE coordinator – who assisted her with the necessary paperwork and helped secure a \$5,000 federal grant.

“The RITE program has been such an important part of my life,” she said. “I always knew I wanted to go to college and find a great job, but had no idea how to get it done. The RITE program gave me the tools I needed to make my dreams come true.”