

Success Spotlight: Nadia McNish

Nadia McNish arrived in the United States nearly 20 years ago from Jamaica with a high school diploma that proved mostly worthless to American employers.

Her journey took her to New York City, where McNish worked what she described as under-the-table jobs that paid cash for menial tasks.

“It wasn’t anything that was legitimately a job that could make a good income,” McNish recalled. “You had to take what you could get.”

Following a string of challenges, including homelessness, McNish ultimately earned her high school equivalency (HSE) from the Broadview Learning Center in Bloomington.

The program is part of the DWD’s Adult Education network, where Hoosiers can earn their high school diploma or equivalency. Roughly 475,000 working-age adults in Indiana lack a diploma or equivalency, and the program continues working to reduce that number.

McNish graduated in May with a Master of Social Work from the Indiana University School of Social Work, where she graduated with a bachelor’s degree in 2020. McNish also is a practicing intern at Bloomington Meadows Hospital as a clinical therapist.

“I feel like there are people making decisions about people in poverty that don’t really know the life experience of people in poverty,” McNish said. “I’m hoping to be able to be that voice that can speak about it from experience.”

Indeed, McNish arrived in Indiana from New York City in 2014 to live with a cousin in Columbus. The decision was a tough one, especially with the demands of an 8-year-old son in tow, but they hopped on a Greyhound and made the trip.

The plan was for McNish to work and help her cousin out with paying the bills. However, with a son in school and the barriers faced finding a good job, the situation turned “sour” quickly.

“When I got to Columbus it was even more difficult to get a job,” said McNish, who is a U.S. citizen. “I felt like because of that, I was unemployed for so long.”

Her time in Columbus lasted six months before she and her son ended up in a homeless shelter for about nine months. The silver lining to her story, however, is that while in Columbus she started taking classes at the McDowell Education Center before completing her HSE in 2016.

McNish credits DWD’s Adult Education program for getting her to where she is today.

“My goal was to always get a better education,” she said. “I think I was robbed in some way of that opportunity, so I thought if I got the opportunity to go back to school, I’d take off running.”