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ELEVEN GRADUATES OF CUNY'S ADULT LITERACY PROGRAMS ARE HEADED TO COLLEGE WITH HELP FROM PETER JENNINGS LAUREL AWARD SCHOLARSHIP

The widow of the late Peter Jennings recently presented 11 graduates of The City University of New York's [adult literacy programs](#) with a scholarship to continue their higher education -- an award named after her legendary journalist husband who did not finish high school.

The recipients of the Peter Jennings Laurel Award Scholarship faced a variety of obstacles and hailed from as far as Bangladesh and Tibet, but in each case the outcome was the same: Their education was interrupted before they finished high school. Now, after earning their High School Equivalency (HSE) diplomas in CUNY they plan to start or continue college in the fall.

"[My husband] was an outstanding news anchor and journalist ... and he was a good man," **said Kayce Freed Jennings, the executive vice president and co-founder of the Documentary Group and president of the Peter Jennings Foundation.** "He was an avid learner who sought out and soaked up knowledge. And, as you've heard, he was a high school dropout. Every one of you has gone further in school than he ever did."

The Peter Jennings Laurel Award Scholarship, now in its 17th year, recognizes those who have overcome extreme hardship to earn a high school credential and plan to continue their studies at a CUNY college. While they prepared for the High School Equivalency Exam, some of these students had to juggle the demands of parenting and work; some first had to learn to read and write in English.

“The City University of New York has a proud history of reaching out to nontraditional students of all circumstances, including those who need additional schooling in order to begin college,” **said Chancellor Félix V. Matos Rodríguez**. “As the workplace becomes ever more technical, competitive and demanding, the value of a college degree continues to appreciate. The students selected for this honor are strivers who sought to resume their pursuit of an education. We are proud to have helped these students put themselves on a path to a more secure future for themselves and their families.”

The recipients were celebrated during a June 18 event in the CUNY TV studios at the Graduate Center and will receive a \$1,000 scholarship to continue their studies at CUNY.

HSE and adult literacy programs, which serve nearly 7,000 students on 14 CUNY campuses, provide a crucial conduit into higher education and employment for out-of-school youth and adults whose educations were interrupted before they finished high school. Historically, the majority of the Peter Jennings Laurel Award Scholarship recipients, 68%, have been 25 years or older at the time of matriculation. Award recipients have also traditionally reflected the diversity of CUNY. Honorees this year came to New York from Bangladesh, El Salvador, Ghana, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and Tibet.

Here are the stories of several honorees and their inspirational journeys:

- **Tenzin Choklang**, 24, once lived in a Tibetan refugee camp in southern India. He came to New York when he was 12. By his own description, it took him time to adjust to life in the United States, but eventually, he “got serious” about his future. He enrolled in the Adult Basic Skills program at LaGuardia Community College – and even organized a weekend study group for himself and other students. “The program meant everything to me, it was the most amazing life-changing decision that I have made,” **said Choklang, who is now a computer science major at LaGuardia** and earned a 3.89 GPA in his first semester. Included among those he would like to thank is Angelo Ditta, an HSE Program Teacher and Coordinator at LaGuardia.

- **Regina Dorch**, 53, was working at a Pathmark supermarket in Manhattan four years ago when she received a letter informing her that the store would soon be closing and she would be out of the job she'd had for 22 years. After the initial sting, she considered her options and enrolled in the Adult Basic Skills program at LaGuardia. With the help of tutoring provided by CUNY, she earned an HSE diploma and says the program is the reason she's now in college. "Everyone learns differently," **said Dorch, who is now studying business administration at LaGuardia and maintaining a 4.0 GPA.** "It takes some longer than others. I am going to need math help, so I am ready for more tutoring."

- **Sue Ann Simmons** was born in Kingston, Jamaica. When she was 11, she came to the United States to be with her immigrant mother, a nurse, whom she had not seen she was 5. She describes a difficult transition and notes that in high school, she became pregnant. She left school but enrolled at York College's Adult Learning Center. Then, the day after her exams, her baby was born and she did not return to the program at York for 12 years. She pushed ahead with her studies despite going through a divorce and living on public assistance, and her most recent teacher in the program describes her as "diligent, detail-oriented and driven." She earned her HSE and was accepted into York College's SEEK program, which aids students with academic and financial needs. "I know it will be challenging, but attainable," **said Simmons, who hopes to follow her mother's lead and study nursing.** "My dedication to learning is my strongest asset. I have high expectations for my children and, therefore, I must display that to them through my actions and accomplishments."

- **Tamisha Bird** grew up in Brooklyn and chose to go to work instead of finishing high school. When she gave birth to her son, "My whole perception of life changed," **said Bird, who is now enrolled at Medgar Evers College.** "I realized I needed to become a better person for myself, as well as for him." She enrolled in an HSE program at the Adult Learning Center at Medgar Evers, where her teacher was impressed by her kindness toward classmates and her keen interest in social studies and English. She says that Medgar Evers "shows me the importance of my culture and the people who paved the way for students of color to obtain a college degree." She is majoring in science and hopes to become a neonatal nurse.

"We are incredibly grateful to the Peter Jennings Foundation for their generous support over the past 17 years to allow us to recognize a group of exceptional students as they prepare to take the next step in their education journeys," **said Donna Linderman,**

associate vice chancellor for academic affairs. “Our Scholars embody intelligence, tenacity and focus, and are truly an inspiration. CUNY is incredibly lucky to have them.”

Peter Jennings, the longtime anchor of ABC World News Tonight, died in 2005 after a battle with lung cancer. Since its inception, the award has been sponsored by Jennings’ foundation, and for years he served as a presenter at the awards ceremony – a role that was assumed by his widow after his passing.

The City University of New York is the nation’s leading urban public university. Founded in 1847, CUNY counts 13 Nobel Prize and 24 MacArthur (“Genius”) grant winners among its alumni. CUNY students, alumni and faculty have garnered scores of other prestigious honors over the years in recognition of historic contributions to the advancement of the sciences, business, the arts and myriad other fields. The University comprises 25 institutions: 11 senior colleges, seven community colleges, William E. Macaulay Honors College at CUNY, CUNY Graduate Center, Craig Newmark Graduate School of Journalism at CUNY, CUNY School of Labor and Urban Studies, CUNY School of Law, CUNY School of Professional Studies and CUNY Graduate School of Public Health and Health Policy. The University serves more than 275,000 degree-seeking students. CUNY offers online baccalaureate and master’s degrees through the School of Professional Studies.