

Graduate! Philadelphia student returns to college

Kimberly Lowe was one of the first people to access Graduate! Philadelphia's College Success Center — and credits the center with a new outlook on life.

"If you have the right attitude, you can accomplish most things," the North Philadelphia resident said. "I cannot begin to tell you about the power of positive thinking."

Since Graduate! Philadelphia rolled out its services in the Gallery Mall in 2008, more than 460 adult learners have re-enrolled in college, and 10 have already graduated with their degrees. Another 1,000 people are preparing to enroll in college, aided by Graduate! Philadelphia.

And ongoing demand from area residents interested in resuming their college studies has prompted Graduate! Philadelphia to expand its services to six satellite locations throughout the city.

Graduate! is now at four CareerLink Centers in Center City, North Philadelphia, Northeast Philadelphia and Germantown. It also provides college advising and success services at CORA Services' Neumann Center in Kensington, and at Catholic Social Services' Northeast Family Service Center. The new locations bring the free Graduate! Philadelphia services into the neighborhoods and make them more accessi-

ble for residents.

"The new locations are a great opportunity for individuals to access "one-stop shopping" for college

representatives of 15 different colleges, file for financial aid, get advice about next steps, make a plan, all not far from where you live or work," said Hadass Sheffer, Executive Director of Graduate! Philadelphia.

"We're delighted so many comebackers have chosen to return to college and complete their degrees." Graduate! Philadelphia was founded in 2005 in response to the critical shortage of adults with college degrees in the region's workforce. At the time, more than 80,000 Philadelphia residents had some college credits but no degree. Statistics show

See "Graduate" page 12 that getting a college degree brings better job opportunities and about \$1 million more in wages over a person's career. In 2008, Graduate! Philadelphia began offering adults its innovative college access and success services, which guide prospective adult returning students from exploration of opportunities to graduation with a two- or four-year college degree.

Fifteen colleges and universities participate in the Graduate! Philadelphia initiative. They were selected

for their high graduation rates, adult-friendly services, courses that are flexible, focused and convenient for adults, and all are fully regionally accredited.

In many senses, Lowe portrays the prototypical Graduate! comebacker story.

Physical problems have plagued Lowe and her family over the years, but with her health improving, the one-time corrections officer first visited Graduate! Philadelphia in 2008, enrolling that fall at Chestnut Hill College. There she resumed working on a bachelor's degree she put aside in 1989.

Lowe is majoring in human services, with a minor in psychology.

Lowe, 38, even made the dean's list and is on track to graduate in the spring of 2011.

Lowe anticipates a new career as a life coach.

"I want to teach people to empower themselves," she said.

Graduate! Philadelphia Graduate! Philadelphia is an initiative of the Philadelphia Workforce Investment Board and the United Way of Southeastern Pennsylvania to increase the number of working adults with college degrees in the Greater Philadelphia region. For more information, please visit www.GraduatePhiladelphia.org



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20 years after putting aside her degree, the College Success Program at Gallery was Kimberly Lowe's first step in her return to academia