

Zak's YMCA Adult Education Success Story

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"They didn't know what to make of me," recalls recent YMCA Educational Services student and graduate Zakarius "Zak" Aluisa, as he looks back on his educational journey. Diagnosed with Asperger's as a baby, Zak faced challenges throughout his primary and secondary school education.

Starting in elementary school Zak was placed in special education classes and was held back in the first grade. "It was tough," he recalls, "I always wondered, why can't I attend regular classes?" He was told he needed more "accommodations" and as a young child, he could not understand what that meant. Things worsened in middle school and with each academic year, he found it increasingly difficult to focus his attention on the curriculum – especially math. Frustrated and falling further behind, Zak gave up on finishing high school and dropped out.



Zak with diploma and YES educator Mary Popp

Despite his negative experiences, Zak kept feeling called back to finish his high school education. With encouragement from his father and friends, Zak eventually enrolled in the YMCA Educational Services Program. There he found a welcoming environment and supportive educators committed to helping him with his educational goals. This year, he passed his final HiSET. With great pride, Zak walked across the stage to receive his diploma at the University of New Orleans' citywide graduation ceremony on June 24, 2023. Armed with a new sense of confidence and purpose, Zak enrolled at Delgado Community College, where he is taking his first general education classes. With this new chapter comes the opportunity for him to chart his own course and choose what he wants to focus on. We wish Zak all the success in the world and will be there to support him.

About YMCA Educational Services (YES) Adult Literacy Program

YES is the only agency in Greater New Orleans with a special focus on helping the city's lowest-level readers -- those who are functionally illiterate and those who cannot read at all -- to complete their education, achieve employment, and access our social services network. YES primarily serves students in Orleans Parish, operating out of the main branch of the New Orleans Public Library in the CBD.

For more information about the YMCA of Greater New Orleans and to stay up-to-date with community programs and events, join our mailing list or follow us on social media:



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