

Connect2Complete: A Conversation with Allia

Connect2Complete Mentee – Edmonds Community College, WA



Allia Emerson had four years of experience working for Oregon Parks and Recreation when funding was significantly cut from the programs she served – and she was out of work. When she applied for a role as a Park Ranger Assistant at the Deschutes State Park, another candidate with an Associate Degree was given priority. To support herself and her daughter, Allia worked in food service for about a year. But then “everything came crashing down on me,” Allia explains. Hoping to provide a better opportunity for herself and her daughter, Allia moved to Washington to be closer to family and to further her education.

After enrolling at Edmonds Community College, Allia struggled in her first semester to get acclimated – particularly in managing her schedule as well as her daughter’s. At first, Allia relied on the help of a friend who had attended Edmonds to “show her the ropes” – but it wasn’t until her developmental English class that she began to realize what the college had to offer. One program offered was Connect2Complete, and when Allia found out she could participate in service-learning trips that focused on community gardening and sustainability, she jumped at the chance to participate.

Now in her third semester of Connect2Complete, Allia is a true believer in the power of service-learning: “When you get a classroom together and you all go on a trip, you really interact with your classmates. Sitting in a classroom all quarter, you don’t get to know people behind you or across the class.” But for Allia and her class, service-learning made the difference: “You learn to communicate. It creates a bond. You develop skills within yourself. There are more learning experiences when you take the class somewhere else.”

Allia is the type of person who tries to be positive about everything. But early on in her college experience at Edmonds, it wasn’t always easy. “It was a struggle to wake up and say ‘Ok, this is going to be a good day.’ It’s easy to say that now. As soon as I get to school I feel better.” Because of Connect2Complete and service-learning, Allia has been able to develop her passions in a way she could have never imagined: “C2C helps with college classes and everyday life. I would tell every college campus in the world it’s the most fantastic program to have.”



Campus Compact

Connect2Complete, a program of Campus Compact supported by The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, works with nine community colleges in Florida, Ohio and Washington to utilize peer mentoring and community-engaged learning as strategies for retention of low-income, developmental education students.