

In our view: More Than Dreams

Columbian editorial staff
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The finish line might have seemed stranded in unreachable infinity back in 1995 when 64 Washington Elementary fourth-graders and the adult volunteers with the first "**I Have a Dream**" class began their journey. The goal was to get the kids through high school and give them a chance at higher education. Two years later, 68 "Dreamers" at Hough Elementary School joined the journey with their own adult mentors.

Turns out the finish line wasn't so unreachable after all. Eighty-seven percent of those kids have graduated from high school, surpassing the 66 percent national graduation rate for the low-income and disadvantaged.

Four of those original fourth-graders have graduated from college. Congratulations to the many volunteers in Southwest Washington's "**I Have A Dream**" program and the four graduates:

- Catherine Lazarcik, nursing, Oregon Health & Science University in Portland.
- Daniel Limonchenko, theological studies, Valley Forge Christian College in Phoenixville, Pa.
- Ken Nguyen, communication design, Pacific Northwest College of Art in Portland.
- Han Tran, criminal justice and women's studies, University of Washington.

For skeptics who might say that four college grads out of those 64 original fourth-graders isn't too impressive, be advised that many more are to come because it often takes more than four years to graduate from college. From those two original classes of 132 students, 60 are still pursuing higher education. Remember, too, the 87 percent high school graduation rate is the best measurement of the Dreamers' primary goal.

Another 83 local Dreamers who will be high school seniors this year and 91 will enter the ninth grade. All were targeted by Vancouver School District as disadvantaged students who would benefit most from the "**I Have a Dream**" benefits of mentoring, tutoring, field trips. etc. In all, more than 300 are pursuing diplomas and degrees, thanks to more than \$2.2 million from local sponsors.

Interestingly, all four of the college-graduate Dreamers were foreign born, Lazarcik in Botswana and of Czech descent, Limonchenko in Ukraine, and Nguyen and Tran in Vietnam. An explanation is offered by Mary Granger, founder of the program 12 years ago and still the volunteer director: "Foreign-born kids have great family support, because coming to the U.S. is a long and difficult family effort. They're accustomed to strong commitments as family units."

Regardless of the background, it's great to see local Dreamers doing so well. No new classes are planned. "We've got enough to keep us busy," Granger said. A staff of three and a budget of about \$3 million is a large undertaking. She said local Dream officials would advise any other groups that want to launch similar programs.

Among all fourth-graders, dreams are common. Pursuing those dreams for a dozen years takes a special commitment by both the kids and their adult mentors. But the rewards are worth it all

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