



Student Spotlight: Ladronda's Story

Editor's Note: Ladronda is an inmate at Lee Arrendale State Prison in Alto, GA, where Foothills Education Charter High School is one academic intervention offered to female state prisoners wishing to improve their lives through education. The site directors at the Lee Arrendale Foothills Site are Lari Scarborough and Ken Knight.

Ladronda's story was captured by a fellow inmate who serves as an ELA teacher's aide in the Foothills program. This writing has not been edited, as we wish to honor Ladronda's voice and the voice of the fellow inmate who was inspired by Ladronda.

If bragging rights belong to any Foothills student, they belong to Ladronda Hamilton at the Lee Arrendale site. Ladronda began the charter high school program at its inception in January 2015. This was a new thing for the Department of Corrections – a high school inside a prison. Ours was the first, and that first roster of kids worked hard. Prison administration has always been candid about the importance of the program. We, as aides, try to press upon the kids the value in opportunity that this education provides, which is in many cases one not easily affordable or accessible to them in the free world. Some kids *get* that more than others; Ladronda is at the top of that list.

Ladronda came into this program with zero credits. Zilch! Incarcerated when she was only 14, 7th Grade was her last formal education. Observing her focus and dedication over time, I can tell you that Ladronda has perspective other, "traditional" high school students can't even imagine. Her need to succeed is imminent. Her perseverance and the purity of her determination are so refreshing. After being incarcerated for almost eight years, Ladronda's top priority is equipping herself with the tools necessary to lead a productive, self-sufficient life once she steps outside these gates. That's how she's completed 23 credits – that's all four years of high school – in just 14 months!

Family means everything to Ladronda, and she wants to make them proud. She is a middle child of six, and has nine nieces and nephews. "I have a 15-year-old brother that I want to be a role model for," she tells me. When she puts on that cap and gown to receive her diploma in June, her mother, brother and nephew will be here to watch, to applaud her hard work. She'll be the first one in the family to graduate high school.

"You know math is my weakest subject," Ladronda admits, a slight laugh in tow. I'm looking over a shoulder I've peered over so many times, silently hovering as she wraps up *Math & Finance*. Lots of students put math courses off until the very end, but I've never watched another plow through it so consistently as Ladronda has. She wants to go to college and study journalism. I've read several of the poems and plays she's written, mostly about her own life. These are clear indications of talent. When Ladronda goes to the transition center this summer, it is my highest hope that the department will allow her to take college classes. No other 22-year-old has *earned* her way back, has opened her own doors to building a better life like she has. That's exactly why Ladronda Hamilton is – and will continue to be – a story of hope, hard work and success.

—LASP Inmate, Teacher's Aide at Foothills Education Charter High School



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"We, as aides, try to press upon the kids the value in opportunity that this education provides, which is in many cases one not easily affordable or accessible to them in the free world."

Message from the Superintendent

Foothills is making a difference, one student at a time. In this issue of *The Foothills Review* enjoy the profile of student Ladronda at Lee Arrendale Foothills. This is one focused young lady who certainly sees the value of education as she plans to exit the corrections system this summer. Her story is a reminder of the importance of focus and determination. We applaud her repurposing and refocusing her life and her future. We are all better for her efforts. You will also enjoy hearing from Madison Foothills site director Dr. Andy Felt and his thoughts about Foothills and how the Madison County community has joined to provide support.

Foothills is setting up a scholarship fund if you are interested in making a donation so that students can apply to earn support for books, tuition, childcare, and transportation as they attend the post-secondary training. Please contact Karen.Patman@foothillscharter.org if you are interested in making a donation.

It is a good day for Foothills; it is a good day for Georgia,

*Dr. Sherrie Gimbey-Sherman,
Foothills Superintendent*



Dr. Andy Felt, one of the site directors at the Madison Foothills Site, discusses the vision and mission of Foothills with the Madison Area Resource Team.

The Magic in New Beginnings and Caring Adults

Dr. Andy Felt, one of the site directors at the Madison Foothills Site, knows that there are a thousand reasons why a kid might not graduate. He recently spoke to the Madison Area Resource Team, a community collaborative made up of the Madison County Family Connection and other local service agencies. His passion for the vision and mission of Foothills Education Charter High School was evident and personal—he was almost a high school dropout once upon a time.

Two things made a difference for the young Andy Felt—a fresh start at a new school and having teachers who cared about him. The Madison Foothills Site provides those same opportunities for many students who might otherwise have become dropouts. As Dr. Felt explains, these kids are “worth saving—you never know what they could be.” Foothills is not about “giving away diplomas,” but it is about “removing obstacles that keep people from graduating.”

Like several of the counties served by Foothills Education Charter High School, Madison County is home to many economically disadvantaged children, who experience barriers to graduation. For Dr. Felt, Foothills is a way to break the “cycle of poverty.” The Foothills staff at the Madison site are carefully chosen to provide students with caring adult figures who do “everything they can to keep students there.”

The Madison Foothills Site is directed by Dr. Felt and Renee Padgett. Like all Foothills sites, the Madison site allows for flexibility in the students’ schedules. Each night, Monday through Thursday, students arrive at the site, and they can choose which courses to tackle. Different teachers are available in each core content area each night, allowing students the freedom to work with specific faculty members—or not—based on personal preference.

As Dr. Felt says, there is “power in choice.” It’s just “magic for some kids.”

The Foothills Vision:

Foothills Education Charter High School strives to be an accessible, high-quality high school option that is flexible and responsive to the needs of the People of Georgia and its communities.



**Foothills Education Charter
High School**
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