



## The sky is not the limit

Frankie Saez had a dream.

“Growing up, I always wanted to work in the medical field, especially in the emergency room as an EMT or an RN,” Frankie says. “I love an adrenaline rush and I want to help people who can’t help themselves.”

But Frankie’s dream was at risk of fading away after he dropped out of school in 11<sup>th</sup> grade, started hanging out with the wrong crowd, and eventually wound up charged with a crime.

“I got down on myself. I thought now that I have a criminal record, no one will accept me,” he says quietly. “I was sure I wasn’t going to get anywhere in life with that kind of background.”

So, Frankie got a job working at House of Pizza in Lancaster, set aside his dream, and resigned himself to a life of struggling to make ends meet.

Fortunately his boss at House of Pizza and his parole officer at Lancaster County Adult Probation and Parole had other ideas. They saw real potential in Frankie.

“My boss told me, Go finish school. You can do this,” Frankie explains with wonder in his voice.

“My mom was pushing me to get stuff done too,” he adds. “She really wanted me to graduate.”

“Then the best PO in the county, Mr. Brown, stepped into my life and he told me, ‘You can be something. You don’t have to let this charge hold you back.’ Mr. Brown helped me see that I was capable of much more than I anticipated.”

Brown urged Frankie to go to CareerLink in Lancaster, where he met IU13 GED instructor Mary Edith Leichliter. Leichliter saw a spark in Frankie too.

The push from these key people in his life got Frankie thinking differently about his future. So in January, 2017, he set off on what would become a year-long journey to earn his high school equivalency diploma.

The road had a few bumps along the way. Frankie worked long hours at House of Pizza. Fortunately, he says, “My manager was very supportive in adjusting my schedule so I could do the GED classes at IU13.”

But there were times when Frankie worked late night shifts that kept him at work until 2 or 3AM and he just wasn’t able to get to morning classes.

“I always called my teacher, Mary Edith, when that happened to let her know I’m not gonna make it to class in the morning. But Mary Edith never let me down. She’d just say, “We’ll adjust. You’re not backing down from this.” And then she’d switch around my class schedule to make it all possible.”

With other people believing in him, Frankie started to believe in himself. After nearly a year of tutoring, classes, practice tests, and persistence, Frankie passed all of the required exams to earn his high school equivalency diploma, or HiSET, in December, 2017.

And in June, Frankie proudly donned cap and gown to participate in a formal graduation ceremony with IU13, making him the first of his mother’s children to earn a diploma.

Since graduating, Frankie has taken the next step toward achieving his childhood dream: he has applied and been accepted into the Pennsylvania College of Health Sciences Emergency Medical Technician program. He’ll start the year-long program in December.

“My mom is very proud and excited about what I’m trying to accomplish,” he says. “My main focus is to continue my knowledge into the medical field as far as I can.”

“My family and friends, my PO, my boss at House of Pizza, Mary Edith and people at IU13 and CareerLink – they never gave up on me. They just kept encouraging me and wouldn’t let me give up on my dream.”

Now, Frankie hopes that sharing the story of his struggles as well as his successes will inspire others to pursue their dreams too. He shares a mantra that he now follows – a quote from Marilyn Monroe. “The sky is not the limit. Your mind is.”