

Source: <https://www.columbian.com/news/2019/jun/19/clark-college-graduates-at-larch-ready-to-move-forward/>

Clark College graduates at Larch ‘ready to move forward’

Message from officials, family is they are ‘on the right path,’ destined for more

By [Katie Gillespie](#), Columbian Education Reporter

Published: June 19, 2019, 8:30pm

Share:

7 Photos



Howard Seaworth, center, embraces his stepmother Brenda Seaworth, left, and father Stephen Seaworth after the commencement ceremony for Clark College graduates at Larch Corrections Center in Yacolt on Wednesday. Seaworth recently completed his General Educational Development certificate. (Photo by Alisha Jucevic/The Columbian) [Photo Gallery](#)

YACOLT — Shawn Bjorne walked into Lauren Zavrel’s class three weeks ago, sat down and announced he wouldn’t be doing anything.

That wasn’t good enough for Zavrel, who teaches a General Educational Development preparation class at Larch Corrections Center. You can do this the easy way or the hard way, she told him. But she wasn’t going to let him sit and refuse to work.

On Wednesday, Bjorne donned a cap and gown, and graduated with the record-breaking Clark College class of 2019. He finished his last GED test Monday.

“I came a long way,” said Bjorne, 33. “I didn’t think I could.”

Nearly 100 inmates celebrated at the afternoon ceremony at the Larch Corrections Center gym, which was decked out in streamers in Clark College blue and white. A group of Native American inmates performed a traditional drum circle and honor song in the Lakota language, while the Asian Pacific Islander Club performed a haka, a kind of ancient war dance of the Maori people indigenous to New Zealand.

“This is what it’s all about,” GED teacher Steve Smith said as he bustled about, adjusting caps and clapping backs. “This is payday.”

17 Photos



Gallery: Clark College Larch Graduation [Photo Gallery](#)

Scattered families filled the audience, as well as college and prison officials to celebrate students' GED diplomas, business and automotive certificates, and other educational accomplishments.

"It just touches my heart that he's on the right path," a teary-eyed Brenda Seaworth said of her stepson, Howard Seaworth, who completed his GED tests several weeks ago.

A record 56 of Wednesday's graduates were celebrating the completion of their GED tests. For that, Zavrel thanked her teaching assistants, who serve as inmate tutors for their peers in class.

Clark College runs a rigorous tutor training program at Larch Corrections Center, which was recently certified by the College Reading and Learning Association. College officials say it's the only prison-based program in the world to have the industry-standard recognition.

Zavrel asked the audience how many had been helped by a tutor on their path to education. Nearly all raised their hands. Then she asked the tutors themselves to stand to tumultuous applause from the crowd.

"Your impact is priceless, not only on student success, but on my work and drive as a teacher," Zavrel told them. "You make me want to be the best teacher I can be, even on the hardest days."

The message from speakers to the gathered inmates was similar: You're more than a Department of Corrections number. You're a human being, destined for more.

"You have demonstrated today that you are ready to move forward and be successful in your life," Clark College President Bob Knight said. "It won't be easy. There's a lot of ups and downs."

But "education is going to be the difference," he told them.

It's a lesson 45-year-old Halemanu Makekau plans to take to heart.

"I should have done it a long time ago," said Makekau, an inmate who completed his GED tests this week. "It's going to open doors I never thought possible."

Share:

Receive latest stories and local news in your email:

GO

By signing up you are agreeing to our [Privacy Policy](#) and [Terms of Service](#).



Katie Gillespie

Columbian Education Reporter