

Overcoming obstacles

Burke County grad crosses hurdles to pursue career in healthcare

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They make her realize how much we take for granted.

As Channa Perkins watches patients walk through the door, they greet her with smiles. They're here in hopes the chemotherapy will reverse the course of their cancer, but faced with the possibility that it won't. Still, they smile.

That's what amazes her most.

"They can come in here and be so sick and they're still smiling," she says. "They lose all their hair and we complain when we have a bad hair day."

Channa's been watching these amazing fighters for the past four years at the Georgia Health Sciences University Cancer Center in Augusta. As a licensed practical nurse (LPN), she's there to insert an IV, take vitals, draw blood, whatever is need to help them receive their treatment.

She's known she wanted to work in the medical field since she was at Burke County High School, where she excelled in the health occupations courses she took in the career and technical department.

"My instructor was a big influence on me," Channa remembers. "She was always supportive and always kept us enthused in our classes."

But Channa's path to her goal wasn't an easy one.

As a junior in high school, her own life was changed in a lasting way. At 16, she heard the first cries of a baby boy who would bring life into perspective.

And as a young mother, she

watched others in the same situation quitting school. It seemed to be the easy choice for some. But dropping out of school never entered Channa's mind.

That same sweet boy that changed her life gave her every reason to stick it out and make the most of it now.

"It helped me focus," Channa said, thinking back to her plunge into parenthood. "He helped ground me. I had someone else to take care of beside myself."

With plenty of family support and encouragement from her teachers, Channa walked across the stage at the 2003 BCHS graduation ceremony.

Then she was hit with the raw reality that she needed to support her own family now.

"I knew I had to find a career to take care of my child," she says.

That need took her to technical college in Statesboro, where she became certified in phlebotomy. She transferred to Augusta Technical College, taking most of her classes at the Waynesboro campus and earning a degree in practical nursing.

That education helped her land a job in a doctor's office and later at the cancer center.

Now, she's taking classes after hours to become a registered nurse.

Her son turned 11 this year and Channa's continuing to move forward, but not without continually thinking back to the challenges of being a teen mother in school.

Channa wants to see young mothers make their way through school and hopes to

eventually establish a center here to give them the resources to do so. Whether they need to work on their GEDs, search for a job or find some encouragement, she wants to give them another place to turn.

"Burke County has such a high teen pregnancy rate," she points out and adds that dropping out won't improve their circumstances. "I just want to give them support. I've been through it and if I can do it, I know other people can too."



Channa, pictured as a high school senior, became interested in healthcare through courses at Burke County High School.



Channa Perkins cares for patients at the Georgia Health Sciences University Cancer Center.

Contributed

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