

Gabriel Toledo

Class of 2024



Gabriel Toledo's path to earning his diploma has been marked by resilience, determination, and a deep commitment to supporting his family and honoring his heritage. For Gabriel, success didn't come easily. The COVID-19 pandemic brought on intense isolation and hardship. *"I had to leave school, and it felt like I 'failed' both high school and college. It was really tough. I lost a lot of family during that time and struggled with motivation,"* he reflects. Yet, through every challenge, his primary goal stayed the same: returning to his Native American tribe in New Mexico to care for his grandmother and give back to his community.

At 21, Gabriel faced difficulties completing his GED. The short time frame for the GED made it hard for him to absorb everything he needed to learn. That's when his mother discovered the Adult Diploma Program (ADP) at Cuyahoga Valley Career Center (CVCC). *"I jumped at the chance,"* Gabriel says. The program offered technical skills suited to his situation, allowing him to work while continuing to pursue his diploma.

Coming from a Native American tribe of roughly 3,000 people, Gabriel didn't follow the traditional educational path, and the ADP provided him with the flexibility and resources he needed. Since earning his diploma, Gabriel's mindset has transformed. *"I carried around a lot of shame for a while, but now I feel like my options have expanded.* While Gabriel is excited about the HVAC certification he earned through the Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning program, he emphasizes that the diploma was the true key to unlocking his future. *"I needed the diploma to do any kind of job. Now I'm ready to go and do whatever I need to do to help my community."*

Throughout his time at CVCC, Gabriel had many positive experiences that helped shape his educational goals. Being part of a community of students who were also working hard to achieve their dreams motivated him to keep pushing forward. *"The environment here prepared me to be an adult. I made connections with people who were all striving for the same thing, and that made a big difference,"* he explains. Outside of CVCC, Gabriel is actively engaged in his community, especially through his mother's work with Indigenous artists. He enjoys participating in cultural events and has a passion for anime, along with a love for building with Legos.

When asked what advice he would give to future ADP students, Gabriel is quick to encourage others to take full advantage of the resources available. *"Reach out to the staff here. They're really preparing you for the workforce. Don't be afraid to ask for help if you're struggling. It's a challenge, but all the tools you need to succeed are here. Use the discipline and maturity you develop in the program, and you'll thank yourself later. This is a rare opportunity, so don't give up on yourself."*

Gabriel Toledo's story is a testament to the power of perseverance and the importance of community. With his diploma in hand, he's ready to return to his roots, help his family, and contribute to the future of his community. Best of luck, Gabriel! CVCC is so proud of you.

Written By: Makayla Robertson, CVCC Media Specialist

