

BC3 @ Brockway enrollment, dreams on rise

28-year-old earns second degree from site that opened in 2013

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(Brockway, PA) Tisha Neal closes her eyes and sees the past.

There are 20 or more children, some munching graham crackers, others sifting through a sand box, many sounding and re-sounding musical instruments.

She sees the crayons, the glue, the chalk, the construction-paper alphabet in capital and lower-cased letters taped to the wall, and the children's minds opening, that "a-ha!" moment she elicited as one of her lessons in math or spelling or reading or writing took hold.

Now she opens her eyes and sees the future.



Tisha Neal, of Brockway, is shown April 27, at BC3 @ Brockway. The 28-year-old on Wednesday night earned an associate of applied science degree in child development education from BC3 @ Brockway, her second degree from the BC3 off-campus location.

With the "dream" degree she attained at BC3 @ Brockway as part of Butler County Community College's Class of 2017, Neal will return to the preschool and daycare setting she loves with the credentials needed to secure a full-time job.

Her idea of pursuing an associate of applied science degree in child development education from BC3 came as she was finishing her first degree, an associate of arts in general studies from BC3 @ Brockway in 2016, and while she was working part-time at an area preschool and daycare center.

"You have to have this degree"

"To get a better job in a preschool, you have to have this degree," said Neal, who graduated Wednesday night. "I have always wanted to work with children."

Neal, a 2007 graduate of Brockway Area Junior-Senior High, initially attended Edinboro University of Pennsylvania, then transferred to BC3 @ Brockway, which opened in fall 2013.

"Had BC3 been here in Brockway in 2007, that's where I would have gone right away," Neal said.

BC3 @ Brockway, which attracts students from Clarion, Clearfield, Elk and Jefferson counties, offers degree programs in business administration, business management, early childhood education, general studies, office administration-executive, psychology and social work.

Its credits in business administration, early childhood education, general studies, psychology and social work can be transferred toward bachelor's degrees at public, private and online four-year colleges and universities. Additionally, students who complete a BC3 @ Brockway degree in business administration, early childhood education, psychology and social work can transfer with junior standing to any Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education institution, such as Clarion, Edinboro, Slippery Rock and Edinboro universities of Pennsylvania.

Tears flowed when field experience ended

Neal completed a 120-hour field experience during her last semester to help prepare her for employment opportunities.

“She told me every week how much she loved going there and seeing the children,” says Jill Martin Rend, BC3 @ Brockway director. “They cried when she left and she cried when she left.” That, Neal said, “was a rough day.”

In her part-time position prior to her field experience, Neal said she did “a little bit of everything” – “helping kids get their breakfast, watching over them as they played, helping them put on sunscreen or with their homework.”

Nearly every day she would help children up to sixth-graders with after-school studies, “and,” she says, “I enjoyed it all.”

Especially, she says, when that light clicked on.

“Ooh, I got it!” she’d hear the children say. “I saw that a lot. I put some time into some of the kids.”

And into her own studies, Martin Rend said.

“Tisha is very hard-working and she never gives up,” Martin Rend says. “She was a solid student and she never missed class.”

“I want to be that good role model”

BC3's small class sizes appealed most to Neal.

“More one-on-one,” she says of BC3 @ Brockway, which Martin Rend says has a 6:1 student-to-faculty ratio. “If you are slacking or not understanding the material, the professor has time to go

over it and explain it more thoroughly. In a bigger school, the professor might not even know your name. “

Soon she hopes to find herself back in a preschool or daycare setting as a full-time employee, reading to children or having them read to her.

“That is where I want to be,” she says, “back in that environment. I think some children just need a good role model, and I want to be that good role model.”

BC3’s other off-campus sites are located in Cranberry Township, Ford City, Hermitage and New Castle.