

Like many high school students, Natalie Galindez faced an uncertain future after graduation. She had no work experience, no transportation, and no self-confidence. She didn't want to return to school, but because of her cognitive disabilities, she didn't think she'd be able to get a job either.

Natalie's outlook began to change when she met Goodwill's High School High Tech coordinator Claudia Lozano at a 2013 open house at Golden Gate High School.

"Claudia, she helped me a lot, she helped me succeed," says Natalie. "She was like, you need to find a job. Don't just sit around and be a couch potato!"

The Able Trust High School High Tech program is a career exploration program for high school students with disabilities. Goodwill manages the program at 13 schools in Southwest Florida.

"Natalie was the first student I met in Collier County," Claudia recalls of their first meeting. "Natalie had the idea that she had to do something after high school, but the scenario wasn't very clear. She tried several times to get a job, but she was very unsuccessful."

Together, Claudia and Natalie worked to develop a career and education plan. Claudia prepared Natalie for job interviews, and encouraged her to apply for a disability-accessible bus program. Claudia also helped Natalie secure summer work experience at a nearby Goodwill store.

"It was the first paid job she ever had in her life," says Claudia. "That opened her eyes, that she can be productive, proactive, and responsible. Those were the goals we set for the summer job."

"I love to work," Natalie laughs.

With her new mindset, Natalie applied for a seasonal job at the Publix at Pine Ridge Crossing in Naples. The seasonal job quickly became a permanent part-time position as a bagger at the store.

"When Natalie first got here, she was very shy, very quiet," explains Barbara Scovel, Natalie's supervisor at Publix. "She's come into her own. It's a matter of 'Wow, I can do this!' She's very outgoing now, and she's a very good addition. It's changed her, and it's changed us, too."

Natalie is quick to credit Claudia and Goodwill's High School High Tech program for her success.

"When I first met her, I didn't have nothing going on," Natalie explains. "She came around in my life, and she opened it."

Claudia gives the credit right back to Natalie.

"Her success, it's all about her," says Claudia. "She deserves this because she makes a great effort to overcome all the barriers—especially our biases and barriers to including people with disabilities in our lives."



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Breakthrough Graduate  
Natalie Galindez

