



**‘On the Verge of Dropping Out...’
Pathway to Becoming Career Aware**

DROPOUT PREVENTION SUCCESS STORY



NS4ED DIGITAL RESOURCE

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If you can see it, you can be it.
Find hundreds of personal narratives from diverse perspectives that highlight authentic career stories in the **Pathway2Careers Program.**

Learn about career readiness solutions at **ns4ed.com.**



‘On the Verge of Dropping Out...’ Pathway to Becoming Career Aware

Plumbing and mechanical systems inspector Jothum Stallings recounts as a high school student being “on the verge of dropping out.” His career story interview illustrates the effectiveness of developing career-connected learning and the promise of solutions tied to integrating real-life applications into instruction and curricula. **It supports the notion that ‘if a student can see it, they can be it.’** This builds on educational philosophies and constructivist theories that claim exposure to a subject of inquiry (in this case, careers) creates a scaffolding for students to understand better the range and variety of the topic (i.e., the type of occupations), as well as the related skills and the relevancy of obtaining those skills and the credentials (diploma).

Jothum does not directly state, ‘if you can see it, you can be it;’ he tells a heartfelt, relatable story, explaining how he was contemplating dropping out of high school and very close to choosing that path. He was at risk of not completing; he moved frequently and was raised (since age ten) in a single-parent household. He reached a point when traditional school, night school, and remediation failed him. His mother’s intuition proved extremely valuable as she intervened, setting her son up with a meeting with a plumber she knew. Jothum’s mom facilitated what we would call today an ‘informational interview’ with a small business owner and tradesmen. **This meeting and conversation, according to Jothum, changed the trajectory of his life.**

You can still hear the excitement in his voice as he recounts that first meeting with the plumber. That one interview inspired an at-risk young man to become excited over plumbing, over the potential for having a good job, and to find purpose in learning. That interview proved motivational, encouraging completion to earn a diploma. **Jothum’s attitude toward education, high school, and the importance of obtaining his diploma seemed to do a complete 360° once he became career aware –going from “on the verge of dropping out” to persevering in high school and following a pathway to opportunity.** Jothum enthusiastically recaps the day he graduated. He speaks about going up to his plumber mentor, showing him that he had done it, his diploma was in hand. Jothum would go on to learn and work as a journeyman and apprentice, practice plumbing, and later complete additional training to become a professional plumbing and mechanical systems inspector.

“When a student sees it, they can become it.”

According to NS4ed Founder and CEO, Dr. Joseph Goins, NS4ed’s work and the developed educational solutions and services, including the Labor Market Navigator and P2C Math and Career Exploration Curriculum, was created purposefully, in part, with the intent to work to address societal issues and to create opportunities for “social-economic mobility for students.”

Dr. Goins claims, “Our work focuses on breaking the cycle of poverty through education. We provide resources and support to help students see career pathways that offer a better future for themselves and their families.” Moreover, **Dr. Goins explains, “The simple idea that ‘when a student sees it, they can become it,’ is actually a very big idea.”** **By creating social capital for students and ensuring they have social mobility within society, NS4ed’s Pathway2Careers Program puts these ideas to work –connecting students with models and opportunities, supporting and guiding them toward their full potential.** Incorporating authentic career stories into the curricula is one way NS4ed supports social mobility by making sure that all learners are exposed to opportunities and *high-value careers*.



There is a significant equity component behind the concept of building career awareness and linking it to local labor market data-driven career exploration. Career story interviews raise awareness and produce opportunity knowledge. NS4ed's vision and values, facilitated the development of a genuinely career-connected program, complete with math curricula, unlike any other.

The Impact of Authentic Career Stories

NS4ed recorded **300 personal narratives from diverse perspectives**. These career stories showcase individuals working across the 16 career clusters for the [Careers2Communities](#) and [Pathways2Careers](#) initiatives. This project resulted in authentic career stories being brought into math and career exploration curricula. **Real-world working men and women are brought right into algebra and geometry, and their explanations of the paths they took to become anything from an architect to an actuary or a bioinformatics scientist to a chemical engineer are shared.** The recordings make the lessons come to life. In this way, career stories, much like Jothum's genuine and inspirational narrative, are shared and lead to broader career awareness and a valuable career-connected learning experience.

Much like the plumber mentor, interviewees volunteered to tell their stories. Jothum shared his story because the favorite part of his job is "encouraging" and "talking to young individuals that are coming up, learning to be mechanical contractors or plumbers." Some interviewee volunteers have an *if-I-knew-then-what-I-know-now-mentality* and an urge to reach and aid young people. Many interviewees working in today's *high-value careers* discuss not knowing that specific careers or fields even existed when they were in high school. They want to inform students about quality jobs that are high-demand and high-wage. Other interviewees, some *self-described as nearing-the-age-for-retirement*, highlight and emphasize a real need for young people to go into their fields and become skilled to answer the "skills gap" or high-demand for work in their profession or trade. Many have volunteered as interviewees to inspire the next generation of workers.

Throughout the career story recording, interviewees share high school memories and advice; stories of their career pathways (complete with lessons learned along the way and some lengthy, expensive-sounding, meandering pathways); some suggestions for where their career paths may go next; and often guidance, and words of support about obtaining soft skills, becoming financially literate, or having positive, teachable attitudes. **These career stories have the potential, like that of Jothum's meeting with the plumber, to inspire and motivate. We believe and hope that supporting career awareness will help young people find their purpose in learning and motivation to learn about and prepare for "career pathways that offer a better future for themselves and their families."**

» NS4ed created career story highlight videos with interesting interview excerpts. Recordings like Jothum Stallings' video can be accessed over [NS4ed's YouTube Channel](#). We encourage you to share career stories with your students because an inspirational career journey narrative could influence the trajectory of their lives.



Additionally, you may select to share [Denise Ojeda's Career Story](#). Her story offers more insight into the **Architecture & Construction Career Cluster** as she shares how her career journey started in the military and shifted towards working as an electrician and educator.



Click on the linked images or visit the [NS4ed YouTube Channel Career Stories Playlist](#) at <https://tiny.one/2pn8utdc>.

OUR COMMITMENT

Through our commitment to drive results, our partnerships have led us to building comprehensive career and college education solutions. We focus on solutions relevant to education practices and ensure a seamless approach to support career readiness efforts in schools everywhere. Our innovative approach focuses on delivering the best possible solutions to support long-term student success.



Integrating authentic career stories into learning cultivates career awareness & nurtures opportunity knowledge.

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