



## 2009 Graduate of the Year: Tiffany Ramos

Tiffany Ramos has been involved with Goodwill and the Able Trust High School/High Tech (HS/HT) program for the better part of a decade. "I don't remember ever not being involved with High School/High Tech," she laughs.

When Tiffany was just a few months old, her parents began to suspect that she couldn't see properly. She was diagnosed with retinal dysplasia, and has been visually impaired most of her life. Tiffany lost sight in her right eye when she was fifteen, and has low vision in her left, which is aided slightly through corrective glasses.

"People have always tried to tell me that I couldn't do things because of my disability," Tiffany says. "I got picked on a lot. I'm small, and I have some health problems too. I even had educators and counselors who'd tell me I wouldn't make it in the 'real world.'"

Today, Tiffany is employed as a Program Analyst at the Pentagon, a position she found thanks to the Department of Labor's Workforce Recruitment Program. "My supervisor asked me if there's anything I can't do," she explains. "I said 'No,' and he put me right to work. He didn't baby me."

Tiffany found the opportunities to develop and grow thanks to Goodwill and HS/HT. "It helped me to become more assertive, motivated, and self-determined," she says.

As a HS/HT student at Lehigh Senior High School, Tiffany was a two-time delegate at the Able Trust's Youth Leadership Forum in Tallahassee. HS/HT also offered Tiffany opportunities to attend career days, college forums, job shadowing experiences, and internships. Despite being told she'd never make it in the "real world," Tiffany graduated with a 4.16 G.P.A.

"Tiffany is an amazing young woman and an inspiration to all of us," says Tim Goodman, Goodwill's HS/HT Program Manager. Goodman, who nominated Tiffany for the Graduate of the Year honor, adds, "She has become a gifted communicator and advocate, and the best example of self-determination that I know of."

A 2009 Florida Gulf Coast University graduate, Tiffany has continued to represent HS/HT statewide, giving presentations about self-determination, individual education plans, bullying in the classroom, and self-advocacy. "As a person with a disability, it's extremely important to be an advocate for myself," she explains. "We have to be able to stand up for our rights."

