

Sidy Maiga: Master Percussionist, Recent GED Graduate & Future Undergrad



Sidy Maiga never imagined going back to school.

As a child growing up in Mali school was tough for him. All he wanted to do was play music, and at school that wasn't possible. As a result, he grew bored. So as a teen, he dropped out to pursue his passion for percussion. But Sidy isn't a boy anymore. And he came to realize that to achieve his dreams--he needed to conquer his fear of school.

Music took him far from his boyhood home in West Africa. He moved to New York in his twenties in pursuit of a career as a musician. Eventually, he landed in Providence where he was able to establish himself as a professional percussionist. His mastery of the djembe, a drum of West African origin that is rope-tuned drum and shaped like a large goblet, has taken him on tours all over the world and as a teacher in schools all over the east coast.

Things were going according to his original plan, but without a high school diploma, he felt like he had hit a wall.

"I was playing drums everywhere, traveling around the world and doing fine," Sidy said. "But I feel like, at some point, there are so many things that I need in my life, and usually I depend on people to do them for me." He knew that to get closer to what he wanted in life; he needed to start relying on himself. And that meant going back to get his GED.

Sidy heard from friends about the things you could do at Dorcas International Institute of Rhode Island. He went and did everything from translation to citizenship services. But it wasn't until he signed up to get his GED that things really started to change for him.

He admits he was hesitant about starting school again. Beyond being worried about whether he would find it interesting, he wasn't sure if he could balance work and studies. He enrolled in an ESL class to get up to speed and felt himself getting discouraged—so he stopped going to class.

However, after getting encouraging calls from DIIRI staff, Sidy decided he would give it another shot. He says that staff at DIIRI bent over backward to make sure he would feel comfortable coming back to the classroom, and that made all the difference, "I think they saved my life, and I'm glad I came back."

He said the dedication of the teachers and staff at DIIRI were what kept him coming back. But it wasn't just the teachers alone that motivated him. Sidy realized that he enjoyed school and that "it feels good to learn."

Pushing through his worry, showing up to class and doing his work paid off—he completed his GED. But Sidy decided he wanted to go even further, ultimately he aimed to become "better at his music for his career."

Inspired by his success and with the help and encouragement of staff at DIIRI, Sidy decided the next step would be college. He applied to some schools in the area but decided that his passion for music must lead the way on his educational path. Sidy starts school at the Berklee College of Music in the fall of 2016—and has even bigger plans for after college.

"My dream is to be able to take the world," Sidy said laughing. "Because I want to be able to do something big in life. Once I learn the academic way of music then I can teach African music to the world."