Brenda Tyson fought to give children in the Bridgeport school system a better future for years. Now she's come home to Norwalk, and is fighting to give her own three daughters the best future she can.

Outside her house on Taylor Avenue, overcast skies and the hint of rain allow the air conditioner to rest. At one point, while talking about the recent challenges life has thrown her way, Tyson offers a piece of advice that has become her mantra. She says, “Don't let those clouds come in. You'll get through this.”

Tyson was director of the Promoting Alternate Thinking Strategies program in Bridgeport, teaching teachers how to connect with students struggling with social issues.

Tyson's entire department, which addressed an array of intervention and prevention programs, was shut down in 2008. She's been looking for work since then. “Social programs are always the first to get cut,” she says, sighing, in her Norwalk home. “But they can always build more jails,” Tyson continues.

In addition to job troubles, Tyson's involved in a messy divorce. She married in college and children soon followed. The needs of the family outweighed the need for her degree so she left school. When her husband left, she had to raise their three daughters more or less on her own.

But “giving up” isn't a phrase in Tyson's playbook. Between taking on the role of single mom and searching for work in this depressed economy, she also went back to school. Tyson enrolled in the University of Bridgeport's IDEAL program, seeking a Bachelor in Science for General Studies with a social science concentration and a certificate in criminal justice. She's three credits from completion, and given IDEAL's accelerated curriculum, that places her just over a month away from her degree. She's making arrangements to pursue a master's degree from UConn.

Tyson says she's pursuing degrees not just for herself and the doors they might open, but to help reinforce the drive to persevere in her daughters. She put her education aside once, now she can't imagine not having it. “I tell the girls, knowledge is power and no one can ever take that away from you,” says Tyson.

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by Joseph Cole
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