

IDRA Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program – 2016 Essay Contest Winner: High School First Place



Stefan García

12TH GRADE

ODESSA HIGH SCHOOL, ECTOR COUNTY ISD, TEXAS

First of all I'd like to take this time to thank the school district and my teachers for giving me this wonderful opportunity. Not only have I seen a glimpse of what it's like to be a teacher, I also have been given the chance to help shape a new generation of our nation's youth. Teachers are our nation's backbone. I know the average salary of a teacher is not nearly as much as it should be. This tells me something important, something all students should know. No teacher is in it for the money. The reason they are teachers is because they know the importance of leadership. It takes patience and dedication to be a teacher. Most students do not know this.

The Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program has been mainly about being a leader. To be a leader you must guide, care and nurture for the people you are leading. The characteristics of a leader are that of a mother or father. Not only do you have to care for the people you are leading, you must create a bond with each and every one of them. With some people, you will find out you might need a little bit more patience. Some people just understand that being lost is so close to being found. The night is darkest just before the dawn. So when everything seems hopeless, faith is an essence. The level of faith in a leader will show just how much they are willing to do for the people they are guiding. For an example at the beginning of the year, my tutees would always complain and say how they were going to fail their STAAR exams. On a daily basis, the teacher and I would remind the tutees that everything we do in class will be on the STAAR exam. As their progress improved

throughout the year, I noticed they were complaining less and less. The feeling a teacher or tutor gets when they get through to a student and they understand a problem fully is best explained as happiness and a brief feeling of accomplishment.

This past month, my tutee asked the teacher how many questions are on the STAAR exam? She said that there are 50 questions on the exam. Some students, as expected, said how that was too many questions and that they might fail. Then one of my tutees looked at me, then to the teacher and said, "I'm going to pass, because [my tutor] taught me how to do everything"

Another point I wanted to make about being a great leader is that you not only help others with problems, you help build their courage, confidence, intelligence, and as a human being overall. The Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program opened my mind to better thinking. Also the program reminded me every day that time is limited, not only in class, but in life. I have been given a higher sense of purpose, to that I cannot ignore. I do not know what I want to major for in college, but I do know one thing, whatever I choose, I will help better the world.



IDRA Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program – 2016 Essay Contest

Winner: High School Second Place



Irma Tinoco

11TH GRADE

ODESSA HIGH SCHOOL, ECTOR COUNTY ISD, TEXAS

There was a time when I did something bad. And when I say bad, I mean bad. I'm a 19-year-old girl who is in her junior year of high school. I should have graduated in the year 2015, but sadly the mistakes I made put me in the class of 2017. That's a whole two years of non-success and laziness. But luckily for me, ever since I joined the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program, my life has changed drastically. Now I'm more motivated in everything I do. And knowing if I fail at something, I have two little tutees who look up to me and try to be like me, it kind of makes it hard for me. Because if I mess up, they will think that it is OK to fail, and I don't want that for them.

When I was a sophomore in high school, I guess I was still in the part where I thought I knew everything in life, but the truth was I didn't. In thinking I had everything together; I would skip class every day to the point where I had to make up hours. My junior year wasn't any better. If anything, it was worse because I would go to school every now and then. My mom even got court warnings, and I would lie to her face and say the teacher is just counting me absent by accident.

And then in my second year of junior year is when my counselor recommended me for this program. At first, when I heard the name Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program, my first thought was, "Why would they put me in a class where the only thing you learn about is soda." But I was wrong. My counselor explained what the program is all about. And to say I was going to get paid to go to this class was probably the best thing he said because I didn't like

school. But now that there was money involved, I could assure you that is the only class I wasn't going to skip.

The first day I met my kids [tutees], I was pretty excited. As the days went on, I started to get closer to them, and then I realized that I didn't want to be a failure. These kids motivated me to push further in my education. When you have little ones who look up to you like you're some kind of super hero, you don't want to let them down. So every time I think about skipping, I think of how much I struggle in school, and I don't want that for them.

Thanks to these kids, I asked my counselor if there was any way if I can graduate sooner than 2017. My counselor not only gave me the hard cold truth, but also gave me an opportunity to walk the stage 2016! I cried when I heard the news that I was going to graduate sooner than most expected. And I shared the news to my tutees and hearing them say they were proud of me was amazing. They actually saw how much hard work I put in, and they now want to achieve in their studies. This whole program changed me for the better. I don't skip class anymore, and I am officially considered a senior with a passing grade average. I am forever thankful to be a tutor in the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program.



IDRA Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program – 2016 Essay Contest Winner: High School Third Place



April Bermea

11TH GRADE

SOUTH SAN ANTONIO HIGH SCHOOL, SOUTH SAN ANTONIO ISD, TEXAS

How the Coca-Cola Valued Program has Changed Me

The Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program has changed me because I picked up my grades, and I want to come to school every day. The Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program really made me change my act. Before, I would always have low grades in English and geometry. My mom would always be on me saying, “People would rather be in your shoes going to school for a free education, and you are over here not doing good grades at all.” Looking back is a nightmare, but as of right now, I am happy that I never gave up.

I am very thankful for my tutees because they gave me a push. Steve, Mike and Jennifer* would ask, “Do you have good grades?” I would say yes because I didn’t want them to be like me. One day, my teacher Mrs. Ortega kept us from working because our grades were not passing grades. She told us, “Don’t lie to your tutees, tell them you are not passing!”

When we went back to tutor, I told my tutees: “I am very sorry that I haven’t been coming to tutor you because I have been having trouble with my classes. I am failing.” My tutees told me: “Miss Bermea, be like us. You told us to study hard, never give up and stay focused.”

When they told me that, I had a smile on my face, because they took my advice, and this made me realize I had to do the same thing. My grades are now up and passing.

The Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program really made a difference in me because, ever since I started high school, I never wanted to come to school. I would always tell myself: “Man, I just want to drop out. When can school end already?” But look here, I am going to graduate next year, and I feel better about myself knowing I will walk the stage with my friends and graduate. I never felt so proud of myself and hearing my mom say, “Wow, my daughter is going to graduate!” That makes me the happiest person. I wouldn’t change any of this experience. I just want to make my family proud of me.

Thanks to my tutees, Steve, Mike and Jennifer for the person I am today because without them, I wouldn’t be walking the stage next year. Like they say, “Study hard, never give up and stay focused.”



IDRA Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program – 2016 Essay Contest

Winner: Middle School First Place



Alexandra Sánchez

8TH GRADE

MS 331 THE BRONX SCHOOL OF YOUNG LEADERS, NEW YORK CITY

Have you ever looked back at something you didn't want to do and, after doing it, actually took delight? I'm Alexandra Sánchez, 14 years young, and a tutor from the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program. Let me just be candid with you from the start, I was in it for the money at first. I wanted to go to work and get paid. I wasn't passionate about being a tutor. Since I've become a tutor, I've learned a few things, not only for future jobs, but also how tutoring led me to see how important it is to have support. As a child or an adult, you need someone to push you to your fullest and let your potential peek through all doubt and confusion.

Since I've become a tutor, I've been exposed to many great things. My first job – not many people can say they've had a job at a young age. That's an advantage already. I've become more responsible. I've created my first resume so when I get another job, I can present it and look professional. I can envision myself in the future applying for jobs and being prepared. This tutoring job had certain requirements to be able to keep the job: dressing in a school uniform, keeping grades up, arriving to school every day on time. If the truth be told I didn't want to lose my job, so following the requirements became a necessity. This job has kept me going when I just wanted to throw in the books and give up on my school work.

I've had to make sacrifices, as a young person. I can say that one of the most important things in middle school to me is being able to hang out with friends. The tutoring job was scheduled when I had enrichment (gym, art, technology), where I could talk to my friends without limit, and it wasn't a distraction to any teachers. I gave that up to work with second grade students. I might have complained about it multiple times, but I'm glad I made the sacrifice.

Moving along, I had three tutees, Luis, Brent and Jason*. I noticed that they were very smart right off the bat, but they just needed the push to get them working on their own. They needed confidence in themselves, because there would be times where they had the right answer but did not state it for fear of being wrong. They second-guessed themselves a lot. That's when I realized that I did that myself too. It wasn't just them.

Everyone needs that person who supports them no matter what, no matter the circumstances. That supporter builds a confidence in a person. After a while, a person starts doing the stuff on their own. My tutees at first called me all the time to help them with questions. After a while of

motivating them and telling them they could do it, they started believing they could too. I remember once, I went up to one of my tutees, Luis. I asked him if he needed any help, and he said, "I got it, I got it." It was so heartwarming! When I went back to check his answer, it was right. He did get it. After his teacher of course, I felt like I accomplished something. That goes for my other two tutees too, Brent and Jason. They can accomplish their work on their own too. Comparing them from the beginning when I first started this job, to present day, their confidence has drastically changed. That's memorable to me because, when I look back at this job, it won't just be that I helped them with work, I helped them find the capability in themselves, even if they don't fully understand it themselves.



This reality check has made me understand how I can build up my confidence when I need it the most. Talking to someone older with more wisdom helps me. If I'm taking the wrong path, my supporter will there telling me to take a step back and reflect on what I'm doing. Not only this, but I look at my teachers differently now. I'm the tutee in my teacher's eyes. All they want is for their students to succeed, trying to give us "tutees" (me and my fellow classmates) the support we need.

As I get older, when I'm done with high school and I'm off to college, this is the advice I'll use for myself. When I feel like school is becoming a burden and it's too much to carry, I'll find a supporter – one who will help me through the times of darkness and just be there the way I am for my tutees.

I'm very grateful for this job and all the skills the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program has given me for future life experiences. I've learned self-confidence and job skills. Now I work by the quote, "The support of one is a part of real foundation and existence" (unknown). Since I became a tutor, the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program has taught me responsibility, sacrifice, and what it means to truly support another human being.

**names changed for privacy*

IDRA Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program – 2016 Essay Contest Winner: Middle School Second Place



Mykel Jones

8TH GRADE

JOHN STILL K-8, SACRAMENTO CITY USD

Since I became a tutor, I have become more responsible. Also, I have taken my work and grades more seriously. Plus, I am more understanding of disobedient kids. I have become more patient than what I used to be. Even now I still goof around but not as much as I use to. This job has changed me in so many ways. Here is my story of how I have changed in a good way.

When I began middle school, I didn't worry about much. It was okay to have one F and average grades. Most of the time, I wouldn't participate in school. I believed that I could worry about important stuff when I became 18 and was in college. Teachers would try and help me reach my full potential. Most of the time when they tried to help me, I wouldn't want to pay attention to them.

One day, I got a call saying I could get paid for tutoring. I was ecstatic that I would be getting paid, more so than the actual tutoring part. The day I began, the kids were loud and rude. I thought about yelling on the first day. As I was thinking, I realized that I was the same way. Teachers had to be patient with me when I misbehaved, so I had to do the same.

When I returned the next day, I remembered I had to be patient with my kids. So as one of my tutees came, they were talking to their friend and then sat down. We began to review long "O" words. Steve didn't want to pay attention, I felt myself getting angry, but I remembered to be patient. So to make it interesting, I made it into a game so he would enjoy it more. From that day forward, I learned to more patient and understanding to my tutees.

As I started tutoring I got my first check. I usually waste money, but when I cashed the check I was thinking of ways to be responsible as an adult.

I then remembered it was Christmastime, and my mom didn't have a lot of money because she has six kids. So as she was buying groceries one day, I told her she could have one hundred dollars of my check so she can buy stuff for the house.

As I started to become more responsible by helping my mom and showing up to work on time, I wanted to show my mom I could raise my grades as well. When it came to my grades, I just wanted a few A's, some B's, and maybe one F. But then I thought: "Why should I sell myself short? I should try getting honor roll." The second quarter was coming up, so I began studying day and night until I got good grades. Finally, the second quarter came, and they passed out honor roll awards. I was shaking so much. My teacher came and said, "Congratulations, you did it!"

Without this job I would have not gotten the inspiration to do great things. Now I am passing all my classes with A's and B's. I help my mom with anything she needs help with, and I am a more patient and understanding person. Also, I'm showing up to work right on time. I'm grateful to have this opportunity to be in the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program. It has changed me into a brighter, young man.



IDRA Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program – 2016 Essay Contest Winner: Middle School Third Place



Melakii Uribe

8TH GRADE

ZAMORA MIDDLE SCHOOL, SOUTH SAN ANTONIO ISD, TEXAS

How Tutoring Has Helped Me

When I first saw my schedule, I saw that one of classes was the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program; honestly, I didn't know what it was. When I went to that class, the teacher talked to us about what it was about. She said, "This class is about going to Benavides Elementary and tutoring kids to help us become positive leaders." When I heard her say that, I looked around and noticed everyone who was there were people who didn't have good grades. When I stopped looking around, in my mind I asked: "Why me? What was the reason I was there?" I was questioning myself because I couldn't keep my grades up. "What makes them think that I'm able to tutor a little kid?"

We were in the class for two weeks so we could learn what to do. Well the day came when it was time to go to Benavides Elementary. I met a boy named Roy*. He had trouble writing. I went up to him. I froze and thought of things to say, but words never came out of my mouth. We walked back, and I just kept thinking about him and his problem with spelling and decided to help teach him to respect all of the students who corrected him and to remain positive when it happened.

Tutoring has helped me in many different ways. It has helped me personally, because as a person, I used to be unhappy. But after being In the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program, I started to see

how the elementary students became excited when I walked into the class. It made me happy. At first, I felt awkward but then I got used to it. When I walked in the classroom, their faces light up, and I want to hug them. They run up to me and hug me tight. One of the students didn't want to let go, and he told me, "I love you."



This program changed my attitude as well, because my attitude was negative in the beginning. I've started to respect people more. The students [tutees] taught me how to have confidence and how to make other people happy too. It also has helped me to be more respectful to my family and teachers and classmates. The Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program is a great program for kids who get in trouble, like me. I've been getting into trouble since I can remember. I am a different person when I am in class with my tutees. I am the one setting the example and helping them with work. I thought I wasn't smart enough to help them, but now I know I am. In the end, I'm proud of what I've accomplished through this program. I thought I was tutoring and helping Roy, but, really, he was helping me.

**name changed for privacy*