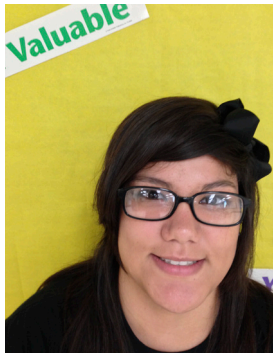


Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program – 2014 Essay Contest

Winner: High School First Place



Michaela Valdez

9TH GRADE

SOUTH SAN ANTONIO HIGH SCHOOL, SAN ANTONIO

How has tutoring helped me?

Alone, timid and depressed. That's how I started off my ninth grade year. I was very shy, alone and depressed. I have always been alone because I was so shy. The reason I was so shy was because I was homeless. I was always insecure about myself for that one reason. I had lost all of the self confidence that I had. I had always been the shy and quiet girl in the back of the class; not many friends or anything. I started failing because I had so much on my mind. Then one day, I asked my teacher if she knew anyone who would hire someone at 14 years old. Then, she introduced me to the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program.

Mrs. Jones explained to me how the program works. I had to tutor three kinder garden students at Kindred Elementary School. These students have helped me with being more social. Because of my tutees looking up to me, I wanted to change for them. I went from the girl with depression who was alone and wore all black every day, to someone who

is happy, social with friends and wears more color. I used to hide the real me from the world because I feared being judged. But spending so much time with my tutees, they taught me that it's okay to be myself. So now, because of them, the real me is here. I'm not trying to be someone else anymore.

Before I started this program, I was homeless and depressed. Now, with the money that I get and the kindergarteners that I tutor, I have a house. I have gained my self-confidence back. I

used to never have faith in myself, until now. Now that I have hope and faith, my grades have gone up dramatically. I used to have a 40 in my Algebra class. Now, I have an 80. And it's all thanks to this program. The Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program has helped me improve myself: personality wise, appearance wise and financial wise.



Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program – 2014 Essay Contest

Winner: High School Second Place



Nicholas Alderete

9TH GRADE

SOUTH SAN ANTONIO HIGH SCHOOL, SAN ANTONIO

The Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program has helped me see people different. In this program, I have seen that they actually care for me. I used to have a very bad attitude, and my grades are not the best. I have never been a good student. I have difficulty in math, reading, science, and basically mostly every subject there is. This program has made me realize that grades are important to keep up. The program is the reason my grades are passing, and my life is gotten better.

I had always heard about this program, but I have never would of guessed that it would be this life changing to me. The thing I do in this program is tutor kids, which is actually not bad. I would always think that it would have no effect, but it turns out that it does affect my life. The kids all love me because I help them succeed in school, tell them that it is fun and not that bad as you think. This program is amazing. The best part about this program is that I get to tutor three tutees from the elementary school. They are the best when it comes to learning, they actually enjoy leaning when I tutor them.

When I go to the school, they are excited to see me. When I start to tutor them, they know everything now. When I got there on my first day, I saw that they struggled, but throughout the year I have taught them a lot. Well, the only reason I know that is that every day I go, they get better.

These third graders have made me feel special. They welcome me every day I go tutor with a jump of cheer and scream my name “Nicholas!” It’s amazing how they do that and make me feel important.

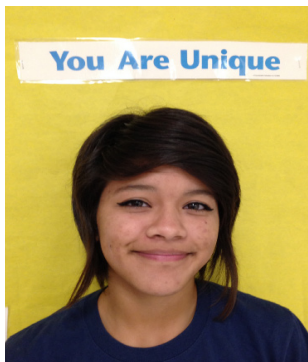
I have tutored them in math, reading and spelling. They have learned a lot and come to school every day. Attendance was a problem with them, but now they show up every day. I am so proud of them. My attendance used to be off. I never wanted to come to school, but those kids made me come to school every day. They are also the reason my grades are up, so that they can look up to me and say “He is really smart.”

I would have never guessed that I would become the person I am today. It is still surprising to me. My grades were not the best, but ever since I joined this program I stay for tutoring and have picked up my grades for them. I am still struggle with algebra, but I am working my hardest to get it and keep it up. The program has made me feel important to those kids. I was even interviewed for the Channel 4 news and was on TV. I even came out in the newspaper for working hard at tutoring those kids. I told them that my life has completely changed since I have started the program, and nothing will make me go back to the way I was.



Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program – 2014 Essay Contest

Winner: High School Third Place



Melina Martinez

9TH GRADE

SOUTH SAN ANTONIO HIGH SCHOOL, SAN ANTONIO

What the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Did For Me

The Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program really is life changing. It has given me a different perspective on what I want to do with my life. I truly believe that getting the opportunity to be a tutor has been one great blessing.

Before I was introduced to the program, I was a girl who would walk the halls of my school and feel so small and invisible. I was struggling with my classes. I never took the opportunities to go to tutoring. I thought there were more important things to do. Thanks to the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program, my eyes have been open to all the advantages life has to offer. I now go to tutoring in the mornings to catch up on my school work. I now walk through the halls of my school with confidence and pride. One day, I hope that I will become someone in life. I feel not only did the

Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program change my life, it has changed my tutees' lives too. I see them improving their grades just like me. They're not so timid to raise their hand to answer a question. They actually try to compete with each other on who can answer first. My tutees Adrian, Paula and Melanie* are very bright young students, and I am happy to have the privilege to work with them. Knowing that I am helping better someone's future brings a warm feeling to my heart.

The Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program has given me the opportunity to turn my life around, and it's an experience I will take with me for the rest of my life. Thank you!



*name changed for privacy

Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program – 2014 Essay Contest

Winner: Middle School First Place



Christian Ortiz

7TH GRADE

DOMINGO TREVIÑO MIDDLE SCHOOL, LA JOYA, TEXAS

Since I became a tutor...

I am very thankful to the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program. It changed my behavior, attitude and the way I viewed things immensely. Before I was in this program, I was very ignorant toward my teacher's lessons. Even though they had talks with me about my ignorance in class and my behavior when I interact with my colleagues, the talks really never seemed to get through my head. I also had troubles at home because I was very slothful and irresponsible. I would always argue with my parents because I did not want to do my homework and chores. Deep down, I have always wanted to change, but I had a very weak will and could never better myself – until I found my way into the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program. This program helped me in so many unimaginable ways.

Since I became a tutor, I have become a better person, and I never expected this. In the beginning of the year, the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program teacher in our school asked me during lunch if I would like to join the program. He explained the process of the program. I immediately agreed after I heard I would be making \$120 month. The first day of tutoring came, and I was really nervous. My VYP teacher chose my three tutees (they were from third grade), and I got to work right that day. We went to the library, and I gave them a lesson about the place value chart, which was what they were learning. I saw how they were so quiet and respectful during the lesson. I asked them questions, and they answered them without any trouble.

That first day was when my whole world changed immensely. I never thought that three little 9 year olds could inspire and motivate me in so many ways. That day, I went home and apologized to my mother, told her from now on I would do my homework and chores without having to be told twice, and I also told her about my first day with the tutees. I told her I would give her \$50 from my first paycheck for the bills. She told me she was so proud of me and that I should write to my father who is in a federal prison. I went ahead and did that, and two days later I received his letter that said he was proud of me for being the man of the house. When I went to school, I told my teachers that I would catch up on all the work and pay attention to all their lessons. As days went by, teachers, friends and family commented on my change of attitude and behavior.

I think I was destined to be in the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program. I think that if I had not been in this program there would be no way that I could change the way I was. To this day, I thank my tutees for being my inspiration, and I no longer do it for the money. I do it for the tutees and me. I personally want to thank the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program for giving me this opportunity to change my lifestyle.



Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program – 2014 Essay Contest

Winner: Middle School Second Place



Gisel Salinas

7TH GRADE

DR. JAVIER SAENZ MIDDLE SCHOOL, LA JOYA, TEXAS



Since I became a tutor, my life has gone through a positive drastic change that I never thought would happen. There have been times in my life where I thought I would never amount to anything because of where I came from. I see my neighborhood, my home that is barely able to stay up because it's falling apart, and my empty table with no food and I have many times thought, "Will this be forever?" The answer to this question was always "yes" up until the time I was enrolled in a program at school that literally saved my life. The Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program has provided that sense of motivation, hope and love that have been missing in my home and with my friends. Because of what this program has done for me, I have learned to love myself more than I ever have before.

Throughout my life, there have been obstacles that have caused me to feel insecure and afraid to take on new challenges. When I started this school year, I was given a class on my school schedule that had the name "VYP" on it. I had heard about that class since last year, but never knew much about what it consisted of. Because I am a shy and timid person, I refused to ask my counselor what this class was all about, and I waited until I got to VYP. As I sat and listened to the teacher explain what the program involved, I immediately became excited to know that I was going to be able to not only teach and tutor elementary students, but that I also would receive a monthly stipend. I guess to any middle school student, the stipend amount I would be getting sounded more like a million dollars. At home, we have always struggled to make ends meet. When I'm not here at school, I'm helping my mom sell candy to help support my entire family. My step-

dad has had a hard time finding work because he has a back injury that was caused by a car accident a few years ago. To avoid seeing my mom worry and suffer, I decided to help her pay bills by giving her whatever money I receive in the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program. My mom seems to be more relieved knowing that I am learning a lot about possible career options through the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program and that I am providing toward the family needs.

It was hard when I first moved to this area from Mexico. For about eight or nine years, we couldn't go visit my family who still lives over there because we didn't have the money for gasoline. Now with the help of the stipend the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program gives me, we are able to go visit them every few months. Also recently, my mom was told by her doctor that there could possibly be something medically wrong with her arm, and it could be cancer. As a family, we had to try and get money to make sure she could receive the medicine and treatment needed to overcome this medical problem. If it wasn't for the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program, I wouldn't have had the money to help my mom live and get better. It has been extremely hard to see my parents go through such pain and suffering. As a teenager, I never imagined I would be going through such an emotional time in my life at such a young age. I know God is pulling for me and giving me the strength to move on not only in my personal problems but as a student. Also, it feels good to see my little brothers and sisters with newer clothes on compared to the rags we used to have to wear when we couldn't even afford a pair of shoes or jeans.

Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program – 2014 Essay Contest

Winner: Middle School Third Place



Johan Servones

7TH GRADE

CAPTAIN MANUEL RIVERA, JR. PS/MS279, NEW YORK CITY

Since I became a tutor in the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program, my dream of becoming a teacher is coming true. When I was in the sixth grade I knew I wanted to be a teacher. A teacher who inspired me to follow this dream was Mr. Smith, my math teacher. He taught us in so many different ways, he allowed all of us to grow and learn. For example, in a fraction question he taught us multiple strategies to solve the problem, and we were encouraged to choose our favorite one. Another way he has inspired me is because he believes that we need to be respectful and follow the rules because it is an important life skill. In this tutoring program, I want my tutees to be inspired and start to think about what they want to be in the future, just like my teacher has inspired me.

When I was given the opportunity to teach tutees from kindergarten, John, Jane and Bobby*, I realized that I was taking some important steps toward reaching my dream of becoming a teacher because I was practicing. I have grown with my tutees and have seen an improvement in how they have developed their skills in their work. In the process of helping my tutees, I realized

that everyone learns at their own pace and in different ways. Being a tutor is not easy because kindergarteners need a lot of attention and patience. They move around a lot, cry and sometimes need a lot of help and assistance. Even though all of these are required of and from me this act of tutoring is something I really love to do.

I love being in this program and spending time with my three tutees. Being in the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program has helped me think more about my own dream and has helped me realize that I know it will come true. First, I have to obtain specific professional qualifications or credentials from a university or college. Next, I know I will have to become certified to begin my teaching career. I know this all will take time and dedication, but I am ready for the challenge.

I hope that I can continue to tutor throughout my middle school and high school years as well. I am confident and excited that my dream is just starting!



**name changed for privacy*