

# Winner: Middle School Second Place



**Luis Vallejo**

7<sup>TH</sup> GRADE

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## What Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program Means to Me

When school started, I felt a big emptiness inside me. I felt that if I missed a day of class no one would notice. I also felt that I didn't make a difference in anyone's life. With me or without me, the world would be the same. Now that I started this program called the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program (VYP), I now have a better self-esteem. Through the VYP, three kids have made a change in my life. Julián\*, Javier\* and Alicia\*, my three tutees, really miss me if I don't go even for one day. For Christmas, I got them gifts, and they gave me thank you cards. It made me proud that, if it wasn't for me, they wouldn't be able to write or they would be behind in their writing. I now know that I am making a big difference in their lives as they are making one in my life. I also have experienced for myself how it feels when students don't listen. So now I try to behave a little better, because I know how it makes my teachers feel.

Another thing I've learned in this program is

being responsible with my money. Now I know how hard it is to actually work for my own money. It feels really nice to know when I get my check. I enjoyed helping others while I earned the check.

The last thing I learned is to work with people I might not get along with. I learned to be respectful toward them. If I work together with them, we get several things done. This is how I learned to work in partners.

Maybe in five or 10 years my tutees might run into me outside of school and they may say, "Look, that's the guy who helped make me into the good person that I am." I am really thankful. The feeling of satisfaction will not only last while I'm a tutor, it will last for many years. Maybe one day they will help other kids like I helped them. It has been an honor to be in the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program. Thank you Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program!



*\*name changed for privacy*