

# Winner: Middle School First Place



*by Wendy Ramirez*

*Eighth grade*

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My experience of being in Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program is something that fills me with the satisfaction of being able to serve and help the tutees. In just a short time I have been in the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program, I have come to realize the responsibility that the tutees have offered me and I am not going to defraud them. At no moment have I felt superior to anyone for being only a student who is involved in VYP. On the contrary, I believe that we can all serve in some area.

The experiences that I have lived with my students are numerous. Sometimes I go home with the faces of my students in my thoughts. When I arrive home, I plan what I am going to help them with the following day. In being in the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program, I have learned to be more responsible. And the way I think of education and the need to continue in school has transformed from a “maybe” to a “yes I can.” It motivates me that my tutees want to follow my example. On repeated occasions they say to me, “Wendy, when I grow up, I want to be like you.”

I am going to share something humorous...I made a change in my hair by getting highlights, and some of the girl tutees said to me that they

wanted to make their hair look like mine. After those comments about me, I realized that my example and my behavior and even the way I dress is going to influence the tutees’ development. And today more than ever, I have proposed to myself to make an effort of being a good example thanks to the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program.

Since I entered the program, I have thought about the future and how I have helped the tutees. In these thoughts, I have included myself and the changes in me. Before, I thought that staying in school was a waste of time, that my brothers did not need my assistance and that they should move ahead on their own. But all those thoughts changed since I entered this program. Now, I realize that staying in school is good for my future and for those who surround me, and especially that I have helped my brothers more. Thanks to my help, they have improved their grades, and I feel very happy. I believe that none of these changes would have happened without the help that the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program has given me.

