

IDRA Valued Youth Partnership Winning Essays 2022-23



IDRA Valued Youth Partnership Congratulations to our 2023 Essay Contest Winners!



High School First Place **MARIAH RODRÍGUEZ**

11TH GRADE • ODESSA HIGH SCHOOL •
ECTOR COUNTY, TEXAS

"Every time I walk into their classroom and see their excitement coming to me, to read or work on their sight words or help them understand brings me so much joy. It shows me I'm doing my best, and they actually want to learn with me."



High School Second Place **CARLY OLIVER**

10TH GRADE • ODESSA HIGH SCHOOL •
ECTOR COUNTY, TEXAS

"Before VYP, I would never talk to anyone I didn't know, and I was always scared to speak my mind. Answering simple questions during class was challenging. But now, I know that my opinions are important, and I won't get anywhere if I keep my questions to myself. I am more brave now and have more confidence. Being in VYP has shown me that my presence matters, and I do have a meaning in a student's life one way or another. This class has shown me how much meaning I can have in the world, and it makes me extremely proud."



High School Third Place **ALINA LOZANO**

10TH GRADE • ODESSA HIGH SCHOOL •
ECTOR COUNTY, TEXAS

"What people don't understand – and I wish everyone could see it from my point of view – is that the little kids you get assigned aren't just little kids, they become a family. You form a special bond with the littles throughout the year of working with them... Getting into the program has made me realize that I want to continue working with kids in the future. I am so glad and thankful that I was introduced to the program, because it has shown me a different perspective of how teachers actually deal with us."

High School Honorable Mention

BRIANNA RODRÍGUEZ – 12TH GRADE • ODESSA HIGH SCHOOL • ECTOR COUNTY ISD, TEXAS



Middle School First Place **MICHELLE RAMOS**

8TH GRADE • ABRAHAM DWIGHT MIDDLE SCHOOL • SAN ANTONIO

"When I started encouraging my tutees, I saw their confidence level rise. As an example... I was grading their papers when I realized that all my tutees got 100s... They all looked at me in disbelief. They couldn't believe that they had accomplished such a thing... Their faces lit up, and they were as happy as they could be... It made me happy because when I think back at my younger self, I didn't have anyone who congratulated me for my accomplishments, no one was happy for me, and now I realize that me being their tutor and congratulating them will help them feel better about themselves and will help them be even more confident."



Middle School Second Place **DAYNAH RAMOS**

8TH GRADE • ALAN B. SHEPARD MIDDLE SCHOOL • SAN ANTONIO

"The IDRA Valued Youth Partnership is an amazing program... I have learned things from my students too, because when I was in elementary, I was not the best kid. But I have learned from that. They [my tutees] have really made me a better person. They have made me more kind, respectful and patient. I now keep my grades up only to A's and B's to set a better example for them."



Middle School Third Place **BRIANNA GARZA**

8TH GRADE • ALAN B. SHEPARD MIDDLE SCHOOL • SAN ANTONIO

"I've always wanted to be able to help kids with things that I used to struggle with as a kid. The whole experience being a tutor makes me feel great. But the thing that sticks out to me the most is the way the kids [tutees] light up when they see me and how they thank me for helping them throughout the day. The thing that gets me up in the morning is the kids. Every morning I get up because I know I have to tutor them, and they depend on me to help them with their work... I think it's what makes the IDRA Valued Youth Partnership amazing."

Middle School Honorable Mention

HAILEY AL-KAYALI – 8TH GRADE • ABRAHAM KAZEN MIDDLE SCHOOL •
SAN ANTONIO



See the full essays online! **VYP Essays**





Mariah Rodríguez

11TH GRADE
ODESSA HIGH SCHOOL,
ODESSA, TEXAS

Valued Youth Partnership High School First Place Winner

The Impact of IDRA Valued Youth Partnership

The impact that a single student can have on another is amazing. Being a junior and being able to teach and watch my kindergartner tutee grow and learn has given me a sense of succeeding.

The IDRA Valued Youth Partnership has impacted lots of lives because of the opportunities it gives students like us. The best part of the opportunity is giving us a salary to help us out in a way and also the free laptops to help us in school, especially since everything is electronics right now. I'm super thankful for that.

However not only does IDRA impact us by giving us tools and resources but it also allows us the opportunity to follow a career path in teaching. I somewhat struggled to find a passion for what I would want to be in the rest of my life. Having the privilege to sit down with my tutees and help them out to understand has assured me of my path.

Every time I walk into their classroom and see their excitement coming to me to read or work on their sight words or help them understand brings me so much joy. It shows me I'm doing my best, and they actually want to learn with me.

The first tutee I ever met was Anna.* She is a social butterfly, but she is incredibly open to learning anything. She is very smart and motivated to do work. She loves doing her sight words and reading little reader books. I am overly blessed to have a beautiful little girl to start with. Everything in the process has been so amazing and full of memories.

Taking this class my junior year was the best decision I made. It surprised me with my growth from when I began to now. All the effects in my

life have made me proud to say I am an IDRA Valued Youth Partnership tutor. It is going to be a sad day to have to let go of my tutee, because she was my first student. From all the laughs we had, to me bringing them small gifts just to see a smile brighten up. Even on her bad days with her trusting me, I'm glad to say I help her through tough times.

The Valued Youth Partnership has given me so much more than a chance to work with kids and discover my passion for teaching. It has given me a chance to be somewhat financially independent. I have gotten to open my first bank account and learned how to spend and manage money. I am so grateful for the opportunity that IDRA has given me. This is an experience that I will continue to cherish and value.

YVP has been a wonderful experience. My tutees have been a blessing to help me grow as a future teacher and bring a smile on my face, to even my teacher being wonderful and helpful. Overall, the impact has been amazing, and I don't know what I would do without this program and my tutee from laughter, the bad days and the good days.

The IDRA Valued Youth Partnership has impacted lots of lives because of the opportunities they give students like us... I somewhat struggle to find a passion for what I would want to be the rest of my life. Having the privilege to sit down with my tutees and help them out to understand has assured me of my path.

** Name changed for privacy*



Carly Oliver

10TH GRADE
ODESSA HIGH SCHOOL,
ODESSA, TEXAS

Valued Youth Partnership High School Second Place Winner

How Has IDRA Impacted My Life

The IDRA Valued Youth Partnership has made me a better student because it has taught me how to be more responsible with my time and learning skills. IDRA has also taught me how to better communicate and interact with students and people in our community. Before VYP, I would never talk to anyone I didn't know, and I was always scared to speak my mind. Answering simple questions during class was challenging. But now, I know that my opinions are important, and I won't get anywhere if I keep my questions to myself. I am more brave now and have more confidence.

Tutoring students has helped me in many different ways. It has helped me be more observant in what my student is doing because they need my full focus, because if she gets stuck or is having difficulties with the assignment we are working on and I'm not paying attention to her, she will not get the help she needs. It has helped me be more interactive with people because having more involvement with the students helps them and me be more comfortable in the classroom and to learn without feeling overwhelmed. It's also helped me be a happier person overall because being with my student brings me so much joy and happiness because of how much she loves coming to tutoring and how she always has a smile on her face as soon as she sees me. And she always has a new story to tell me every time she sits down.

Tutoring means so much to me in a lot of ways because of being in the program and getting to experience what it feels like to be the educator instead of the student. Getting the feeling that you are helping a person with skills they will need for the rest of their lives makes you feel so important and good with yourself. And it has really shown me the impact I can have on a person's life and mindset.

When I first started VYP, I didn't think that I could ever have a meaning in a person's life. But being in VYP has shown me that my presence matters, and I do have a meaning in a student's life one way or another. **This class has shown me how much meaning I can have in the world, and it makes me extremely proud.**

Me and my tutee get along and have clicked in a way I never thought would happen when I started VYP. She is always so excited to see me and gets sad on the days we won't be going up to the school and always says how much she misses me. There has been a huge difference in the way we started and how we are now. I have figured out different ways to make learning for her easier and more understandable, and it has helped her way more than I thought it would and she absolutely loves it. I still can't believe how much we have accomplished in learning together, and I cannot believe it has come to an end as quickly as it has.

What I will always remember the most about the IDRA Valued Youth Partnership is the way the students' faces light up when they walk into the classroom. It makes everyone's day so much brighter.

Another thing I will remember is how to shut off the world I had made myself so that I never had to talk to anyone new that I didn't already know or get embarrassed. But now I am more open to the world. And I'm not as scared to be the person who speaks up and say how I feel even if others don't necessarily agree with me. Because my voice matters and I shouldn't feel restricted because of what other might think about me because their opinions on that don't matter.



Alina Lozano

10TH GRADE
ODESSA HIGH SCHOOL,
ODESSA, TEXAS

Valued Youth Partnership High School Third Place Winner

My Experience in IDRA VYP

When I first started in the program, I knew absolutely nothing about it. I remember walking into the classroom wondering what I had gotten myself into. As the days went by, I was told what the program was and a basic rundown of how it worked. It combined my two most favorite things: helping and kids.

I love and enjoy working with kids, especially little kids. What people don't understand – and I wish everyone could see it from my point of view – is that the little kids you get assigned aren't just little kids, they become a family. You form a special bond with the littles throughout the year of working with them. It's not just simply working and helping them but creating special memories that years from now you can go back down memory lane and remember the things you did with your littles.

My first year in the program was my freshman year. I remember having my little tutees. I say "little" but they weren't so little. They were my little second and third graders. When I first started going into their classroom, they were very skeptical asking many questions. As the days went by, they started getting used to me going into their classrooms, and we established a routine.

Their teacher had commented that they struggled to read at a higher level. Based on that, every Monday and Tuesday, they would read to me their book of the week. After they finished, we would take some time and talk about their book and what their book was about. On Wednesdays, we would work on their math folder, and on Thursdays I would choose a book and read to them, and we would talk about the book. I would go to the public library and take books out to read to them on Thursdays. Tutoring them wasn't a job to me, it was more like a reward to me and them.

Now this is my second year in the program, and I've gotten the opportunity to meet new little kids who I love and adore. The first semester, I had two third graders. Now in the current semester, I have two little kindergarteners who can sometimes be a handful, but I still love and adore them. As I was walking out of the building from working with my kindergarteners, one of my third graders was in line to go into the library. He saw me and came up to me and gave me the biggest hug. It's the little things of going and tutoring a little one that, no matter what, they will always have a memory of you in them.

I will forever cherish many memories of me and my littles. Whether it be the pictures they would draw me or us talking about their books, their little faces when they would see me, or just simply rewarding them with a sticker after doing a good job that day. It's not a job to me but a reward.

Getting into the program has made me realize that I want to continue working with kids in the future. I am so glad and thankful that I was introduced to the program, because it has shown me a different perspective of how teachers actually deal with us. I'm very grateful for all of the good memories I have created with my littles and hope to continue to make more with them as well as meet new littles.



Michelle Ramos

8TH GRADE
ABRAHAM KAZEN
MIDDLE SCHOOL,
SAN ANTONIO

Valued Youth Partnership Middle School First Place Winner

How tutoring has helped me...

This year, I have been honored to be a part of the IDRA Valued Youth Partnership (VYP). This program has helped me in so many ways from motivating me to come to school to helping me become a better speaker in every way possible. Before I started tutoring, I didn't have a reason to come to school. I had no motivation to be here, but tutoring has given me a reason.

This program has not only made this school year more memorable, but it has also helped me make friends that will last a lifetime. It has helped me realize that there is so much more to life than just being alone, this program has helped me. Let me explain how.

When I first started this school year, I thought it was going to be the same as last year. I thought I would have the same friends and classmates. Little did I know that it was going to be far from that. This school year started off as any other year would, but what I didn't know was that one class would change my life forever.

This class was my third period, also known as the period where I would become a tutor for one of the best programs at my school, the IDRA Valued Youth Partnership (VYP) program. At the time I heard about this program, I was confused, simply because I didn't know such a program existed. I was also honored when I found out what this program was about. I was honored that the people in charge of this program chose me to be one of the biggest influences on a child's life.

Upon entering Palo Alto Elementary for the first time, I was greeted with warm, kind-hearted smiles. I took a moment to look around and realize that every moment I spent in that class or simply with the incredible students there would change my life. However, I also wanted to change the lives of the children there. I knew right away

how wonderful my tutees would be when I first started working with them. I saw their potential and was motivated to make a difference in their lives.

The potential these children possess is well beyond what words can express. Ever since we started working together, my objective has been to make a difference in my tutees' lives, even if it is only a small one. I wanted my students to understand that they have potential and that I was willing to work with them to reach it. Even though it might have appeared impossible, I wanted them to realize that everything was possible.

Despite the fact that I was meant to be the one to change their perspective on the world, they also assisted me. When I began working one-on-one with my tutees, I realized I would have to leave my comfort zone because remaining closed off wouldn't aid either myself or my tutees in this learning process.

This learning process taught me and my students that speaking up was necessary if we wanted something known. For instance, when we had to introduce ourselves on the first day I worked with them, I could see right away who was hesitant and who wasn't, so I began by introducing myself and sharing a few things I enjoy doing. As I did this, I could tell that they had a little more faith in me, which also gave them the confidence to speak up. The tutees became more confident as time went on and so did I.

When I started encouraging my tutees, I saw their confidence level rise each time. As an example, I can proudly say that one day in class my tutees were doing a quiz. This quiz was on the identification of letters and the sounds they make. I was grading their papers when I realized that all my tutees got 100. This was an amazing



accomplishment for them because at the very beginning they couldn't identify which sounds went with each letter. When I passed their papers back, they all looked at me in disbelief. They couldn't believe that they had accomplished such a thing. After they realized that it wasn't a joke, their faces lit up and they were as happy as they could be. Seeing this on their face made me unbelievably happy. It made me happy because when I think back at my younger self, I didn't have anyone who congratulated me for my accomplishments. No one was happy for me. And now I realize that me being their tutor and congratulating them will help them feel better about themselves and will help them be even more confident.

My tutees are nothing less than incredible, these kids are amazing in a way that words cannot explain. I can proudly say that I have not only been honored to be a part of this program but that

I have also been honored with the opportunity to be around these kids and change their lives for the better.

I want to give one last thanks to those who have believed in me and given me the opportunity to change not only my life but my tutees' lives for the better.

This program will forever be one of the most meaningful parts of my life, and I am grateful to have been able to be a part of it. It has changed my life in plenty of positive ways, and I know that I have changed my tutees' lives too. At last, I can very proudly say that I have accomplished my goal of changing their lives and becoming a big influence to them. My tutees now know that they have a friend for life and that I am willing to help them accomplish their goal and, as long as they know that, my goal has been accomplished.



Daynah Ramos

8TH GRADE
ALAN B. SHEPARD
MIDDLE SCHOOL,
SAN ANTONIO

Valued Youth Partnership Middle School Second Place Winner

The IDRA Valued Youth Partnership tutoring program has helped me become a better person. You don't realize how much kids struggle with reading, writing or math, whatever it is. They may struggle because their teacher cannot focus only on them. I feel like I help the kids a lot because we have three students, and we focus on them and only them.

The students I tutor have improved a lot. I have noticed it myself. For example, my kids could barely read and write, but we have had a few months to improve. They have worked on sounding the words out.

I also help my brother with his homework. He's in kindergarten, and they get packets of homework to do. I help him with his sounds and how to make groups of numbers for all different types of homework I do with him. So tutoring the kids allows me to help him better. After me and my brother finish all his homework, I ask him if he understood more and if he says yes, I understand that I'm doing something right, so I make sure I do that with my students.

The IDRA Valued Youth Partnership is an amazing program. It has many great people and staff. We got to meet some of them for at least 50 minutes. They also inspired me to be a better person. They made their own organization and have had much success with the organization.

As I'm writing this, my kids are working on their sounds. Me and my kids have such a good bond. They are not afraid to ask for my help, and I'm so glad that I have made them comfortable enough to talk to me and tell me their thoughts. My kids are so smart. But at the beginning, they had a very hard time. We have worked on breaking up words to help them read better.



I had told some people I do this, and some judge us because they think we don't help the students with anything or we just sit there on our phones. But that's not what I do. I can't just sit there while my kids need help. I love helping the kids with learning and watching them grow so much. It makes me a little sad that I won't see them next year. But just knowing I have helped them so much makes me feel amazing that I have done so much for these kids.

One day, I saw my kids were struggling very much on something. After I finished school and practice, I took time in my free time and using the computer the IDRA program gave us I looked up ways to help my kids. I found worksheets, and using my mom's printer, I printed a couple of different worksheets that have sounds and syllables of words so they can have different options.

I have learned things from my students too, because when I was in elementary, I was not the best kid. But I have learned from that. I have become a better person knowing there are some kids who struggle a lot. It made me realize, what's the point of not paying attention or not listening to what they said? Because sometimes, when I'm tutoring my kids, they have no work done because they weren't paying attention, so they don't know how to do it. But I'm very patient with them. I know I have said this many times, but they have really made me a better person. They have made me more kind, respectful and patient. I now keep my grades up only to A's and B's to set a better example for them.



Brianna Garza

8TH GRADE
ALAN B. SHEPARD
MIDDLE SCHOOL,
SAN ANTONIO

Valued Youth Partnership Middle School Third Place Winner

The IDRA Valued Youth Partnership program has been a blessing to be a part of, especially being able to help kids out every day with things that kids all over the world struggle with on a daily basis. I know how hard it is when your brain is still trying to learn new things every day. So, with the IDRA Valued Youth Partnership program, that is possible for the kids.

I've always wanted to be able to help kids with things that I used to struggle with as a kid. The whole experience about being a tutor makes me feel great. But the thing that sticks out to me the most is the way the kids light up when they see me and how they thank me for helping them throughout the day.

When I was little, I would struggle a lot with my classwork while everyone else understood it. Now that I'm looking back at it, I wish they had this available for me while I was still in elementary. If I had a program like this when I was little, I would have had an easy time with tests and much more in school.

The kids tell me these phrases a lot, "I don't understand this" and "How do I pronounce this?" throughout reading or with questions. Whenever they ask me, I go back and help them, even if it's just to help them pronounce a word or to read out a question. It is also warming being able to help them because I know I was able to relate to them when I was around their age. But now I'm older and able to comprehend things that I couldn't when I was around 10 and 11 years old. So now I can use things I've learned over the year.

The thing that gets me up in the morning is my tutees. Every morning I get up because I know I have to tutor them, and they depend on me to help them with their work. Their work always gets done when I'm there with them. And I know it's a big help to their teachers too.

It is also nice to get to know your kids because wherever you go it makes the experience more fun. We get to learn things while having fun and being able to enjoy ourselves.

Since I've become a tutor, I've made many new changes in my life. I have been waking up every morning early just so I can get there in time to make it to the bus. I've also learned new things for them so I can be able to show them what they are learning. Essentially, I am also getting taught things while tutoring. It's also changed me in my attitude and a different perspective on helping others, especially children younger than me. Now I find it nice being able to help others. I now realize what big impact it could make in someone's life.

Throughout my experiences I think it's helped a lot, it's made me more caring, thoughtful and much more. The kids make me love tutoring. I think that bonding with the kids is a very important part of working with kids, and I think it's what makes the IDRA Valued Youth Partnership amazing.



The IDRA Valued Youth Partnership is a research-based, internationally-recognized dropout prevention program that has kept 98% of its tutors in school.

The Valued Youth Partnership, created by IDRA, is an internationally-recognized, cross-age tutoring program with an unusual twist. This dropout prevention program works by identifying junior high and high school students in at-risk situations and enlisting them as tutors for elementary school youngsters who are also struggling in school. Given this role of personal and academic responsibility, the Valued Youth tutors learn self-discipline and develop self-esteem. Schools shift to the philosophy and practices of valuing students considered at-risk. Results show that tutors stay in school, have increased academic performance, improved school attendance and advanced to higher education.

Learn more at
www.idra.org/valued-youth



Celina Moreno, J.D., President & CEO
5815 Callaghan Road, Suite 101 • San Antonio, Texas 78228
210.444.1710 • www.IDRA.org • www.facebook.com/IDRAed