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NEWS

After a fire destroyed one woman's home, Upward Scholars helped her rebuild her life

by Linda Prieto December 25, 2023 10:43 am Updated January 23, 2024 6:30 am



Claudia and an Upward Scholars staff member sharing information at a community event in 2023. Courtesy Upward Scholars.

In early 2023, while a family was out for the evening enjoying time together, electrical issues caused a fire that destroyed their home. Claudia and her family lost their home and most of their belongings. Young Esteban, skilled at regional dances of Mexico, lost several treasured and costly ballet folklórico suits, hand-made in Mexico. Even more devastating, the family's beloved emotional support dog Almendra was also lost during the disaster.

Upon learning of the tragedy, [Upward Scholars](#), a Redwood City nonprofit that makes it possible for adult immigrants in the Bay Area to pursue their education and career goals while advancing economic prospects for themselves and their families, quickly delivered emergency funds to help Claudia and her family acquire temporary housing and purchase food, clothing, and other necessities. We replaced lost course materials so Claudia could continue her studies. And Claudia is especially grateful for the emotional support received through our grief counseling services and periodic check-ins from our caring staff members.

Since our inception in 2010, we have supported over 1,450 adult immigrants, helping them pursue upward mobility through a community college education by providing them with financial and academic support, career development, and holistic services. Every year, our wraparound support — aided by dedicated volunteers and community members — impacts the lives of hundreds of students and their families.

Claudia is one such student. With a desire to improve her language skills and advance her career, Claudia initially enrolled at Cañada College as a health administration major. Originally from Mexico, Claudia's college courses and life experiences have expanded her career horizons. She now aspires to have an impact in her community and to give back through social work.

In addition to her studies, Claudia and her husband are raising Scarlett, 16, and Esteban, 12. Upward Scholars has accompanied Claudia on her educational journey with financial, academic, career development, and holistic support since joining in 2019.

"You make a big impact, not only on the student, on the whole family," she said of Upward Scholars.

'You make a big impact, not only on the student, on the whole family.'

Claudia, Upward Scholars client

With admirable resilience and determination, Claudia has overcome the unimaginable. Now, thanks to the generosity of our community, Claudia and her family are rebuilding their lives. They have found a new home in Redwood City that is affordable, and Claudia is continuing her studies at Cañada. She also generously serves on the [Redwood City Together Leadership Council](#) and as an Upward Scholars Student Ambassador, helping with student recruitment and spreading the word about our organization on campus and throughout the community.

Students in our local community urgently need your help. Usually, the need is for a laptop or backpack or other financial assistance. Other times, the need is for academic and career advice. And in the most dire moments, when the needs are unimaginable as they were for Claudia, we will be there because of your kindness. Upward Scholars is unique in embracing the needs of adult immigrant scholars and providing whatever it takes to bolster students on the path to success. Our wraparound formula recognizes the need to care for the well-being of the whole individual and their loved ones, giving students the power to persist through education and life challenges and restoring their determination and hope.



Upward Scholars client Claudia (back left) with her family. Courtesy Upward Scholars.

Upward Scholars is one of 10 this year's beneficiaries of The Almanac Holiday Fund. Donations are divided evenly between nonprofits that serve local residents and can be made online at [almanacnews.com/holiday_fund](#).

For information about donating time, talent, or treasure to Upward Scholars directly, contact Development Director Patricia Narciso at patricia@upwardscholars.org. And if you're curious to learn more about us, visit [upwardscholars.org](#). You can tutor or help a student like Claudia practice their English skills, lend your specialized skills to the Upward Scholars team, or contribute funds to support our vital work.

Linda Prieto is executive director of Upward Scholars.

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