

ALMANAC



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Holiday Fund: Upward Scholars helps adults move up in careers and in life

By Elizabeth Weal, executive director, Upward Scholars

Even though she was only 16 when she arrived in the U.S. from Mexico, Upward Scholars alum Viridiana Yengle didn't even consider going to high school; rather, she went straight to work.

In May, at age 32, Viridiana graduated from Canada College in Woodside with an associate degree in early childhood education and recently started working as a resource teacher at a local preschool.

Viridiana's trajectory was made possible by Upward Scholars (Formerly Sequoia Adult School Scholars), a small nonprofit that supports adults, mostly immigrants, so they can continue their education in community college, get better jobs and serve as role models and advocates for their children.

During Viridiana's time at Canada, Upward Scholars paid for her textbooks and parking pass and gave her a laptop. Her Upward Scholars tutor, a Stanford undergrad, helped her improve her writing. Upward Scholars also arranged for her to meet with two early childhood education professionals who advised her about her career.

"Upward Scholars is part of my family now," Viridiana says. "They made my success possible."

Ms. Yengle is one of close to 500 students served by Upward Scholars since it was founded in 2011.

Upward Scholars was created to provide opportunities for the most overlooked members of our community. Most of our students have jobs like prep cooks, dishwashers and gardeners. They're the people who make our community hum but are rarely given the opportunity to move up.

Upward Scholars provides students with funds for books and transportation — a bus pass or parking pass — to college; laptops for students who need them, one-on-one tutoring with community volunteers, and mentors for students who request them.

The goal of most Upward Scholars students is to complete Canada College's rigorous English as a Second Language (ESL) program and gain English proficiency. Some students stay in college after completing their ESL classes and earn certificates in areas such as medical assisting and accounting. Other, like Ms. Yengle, complete their associate degrees. A few then transfer to four-year universities.

In December, when Moises Bautista graduates from Cal Poly with a bachelor of science degree in industrial engineering, he'll be the first Upward Scholars student to earn a four-year degree.

Mr. Bautista came to the U.S. from Mexico when he was 18 and attended Canada College for seven years. It took him that long because he worked full-time and had limited time to study. In addition, he knew very little math. He had to start with pre-algebra and work his way up to the advanced math he needed to be an engineer.

"At Canada I learned about life," he says. "And Upward Scholars showed me that there are a lot of people in this community who want to help."

He recently accepted a job offer from Oracle.

Go to UpwardScholars.org for more information. Email: info@upwardscholars.org. Phone: (650) 383-8449. Address: 3481 Janice Way, Palo Alto, CA 94303.

Gifts to the Almanac's Holiday Fund benefit Upward Scholars and nine other community-service organizations.

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