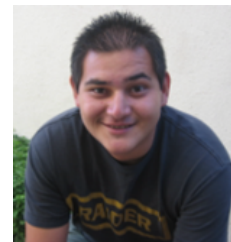


Jose Gomez is a student at Haster East Day School in Garden Grove and was one of three scholarship recipients at OCCHC's annual fundraiser, The Lantern. Also, one of the first participants in Stepping UP's College Awareness Program (CAP) at our Garden Grove site this year, Jose's goal is to earn a degree in Computer Science from UCI. Jose joined CAP students on Stepping UP's College Bus Tour this past summer and shares *"The Northern Trip opened my eyes a lot. Before I thought I would just graduate from high school, but now I know that I can go to a college like UC Santa Cruz, or Stanford"*. Jose loves to play soccer, volunteer and is currently participating in the planning for a mural in his community. Jose shares in his prize winning essay:



*"I have seen and done most things that most parents wouldn't approve of. In elementary I would always try to make my mom happy by bringing her awards. Then around junior high I started to care more about what my friends thought than what my parents did. I never liked disobeying my parents, but I wasn't very popular so I stuck with my friends and thought of them more of a family than my real family I had. Then, when I was referred to ACCESS program my junior year everything changed. I was suddenly the worst of the worst and everyone stopped talking to me. Whenever I saw my friends walking down the street or at a store they would give me the shoulder or act as if they didn't know me. That's when I realized, in life there are no friends all you really have in the end is your family.*

*I have just one change to change all that around. With a degree in college I will be someone, not just that kid that everyone takes as a joke, but someone they will be proud to say they knew. I'm a senior in high school and I have just one year left to make this difference, because only with an education I have a chance to make it in life. Now as for my uncle, I haven't seen him since I was six when he got deported back to Mexico. I can't even imagine the kind of life I would be living if he would've stuck around for a couple more years. I have my head straight now and finally after sixteen years I know what I want to do in life and the roads I have to take to get there. My college years are going to be my hardest because I've always had someone tell me what to do and when to do it, but in college I'm going to be all on my own with only me and my pursuit for a higher education."*

Jose's CAP Advisor motivates him to do better in school as he adds, *"Andrew's smile and happiness is contagious when he meets with me and gives me advice to go to college."* Andrew, a junior at Cal State University, Long Beach, is working to get his Bachelor Degree in Social Work, is the CAP Advisor for our Garden Grove site and shares Jose's progress:

*"Since the beginning of the year, Jose Gomez has been one of the most engaged and committed members of the CAP program in Garden Grove. Over the past nine months, I have seen Jose grow and mature into a responsible young man. As a county continuation school student, Jose strives to earn his credits to return to Santiago High School and graduate with his old friends by the summer of 2008. Although his resources are limited, Jose fully utilizes the services that are provided in his neighborhood including ROP, programs in the Buena Clinton Youth and Family Resource Center, and Stepping UP. He is extremely involved in the neighborhood by participating in various community service events with the True Neighborhood Teens (TNT). Jose is a very talented teenager with a genuine concern and compassion to do the right thing and help others. Through his experiences, he has been able to turn his life around and is starting on a positive journey toward higher education. It was my honor to see him awarded the Lantern Scholarship for his heartwarming narrative. I look forward to working with Jose until he graduates as he will be the first to do so in his family."*

