



"Within each of us there lies a story. Within that story lies the heart of what truly matters."

"Creating responsible adults from East San José's highest risk youth."

# Heart of the Matter

WWW.ALUMROCKCC.ORG

Newsletter for the family, friends, and supporters of Alum Rock Counseling Center

Issue 5, Fall 2011



## Youth Speakers Impress at Ocala Fund-raising Event

ARCC's February 4, 2011 luncheon was a resounding success with \$50,000 raised in donations and sponsorships, directly supporting at-risk youth at Ocala Middle School. Among the 260 luncheon guests were five San Jose City Council members, two Superintendents from local school districts, San Jose's Chief of Police, and a host of other local dignitaries. The event was chaired by ARCC Advisory Board Member Meri Maben from Congressman Mike Honda's office and ARCC Board of Directors member Lt. Ruben Chavez. The event was made possible by the following sponsors: Advocate Level: Hewlett Packard, Brookfield Homes, and Ernst and Young, LLP and Community Level: Filice Insurance, Barry Swenson Builder, Kaiser Permanente, Girish and Datta Shah, Trumark Companies, Maben-Hammon Family, and Congressmen Michael M. Honda. Since community support is crucial to ARCC's success, we were thrilled to see so many people join us for the luncheon.

The highlight of the event was the moving stories shared by youth who participate in ARCC's programs. Guests were visibly moved as they heard firsthand how ARCC helped these extraordinary young people overcome incredible hardships. As San Jose Mercury News reporter Sal Pizarro wrote in his February 11 story about the event, "Sure, Executive Director Patricia Chiapellone had impressive statistics to share about high school graduation rates for students who go through their programs... But what really got the attention of the elected officials, school administrators and other community leaders at the lunch was hearing a couple of students themselves—and their parents—talk about how the center turned around their lives."



Youth and parent speakers Marlen, Jasmin and her mother Maria

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## Letter from the Executive Director

Dear Friends,

As you know, ARCC has been committed to supporting at-risk youth in our community for over 35 years. Our programs address a wide range of issues, but one of the most critical issues we face today is that of Middle School achievement. Numerous studies reveal that middle school performance is strongly correlated to high school graduation and drop-out rates. In fact, according to national statistics, students who receive just one F in middle school have an 88% likelihood of dropping out of high school and students who miss 20 or more days in 9th grade have a 50% drop-out rate.

The middle school years are a critical period for offering intervention services since it is during these years that at-risk students often become disengaged with school, and this trend is even more pronounced for students in low-income areas. As middle school reform expert Robert Balfanz says, "During the middle grades, students in high-poverty environments are either launched on the path to high school graduation or knocked off-track."

With these alarming statistics in mind, ARCC created an agency-wide strategic impact goal to increase middle and high school graduation rates. The Ocala Middle School Mentoring and Support Services program is designed to help us achieve this goal.

The purpose of the Ocala Mentoring program is to keep students on the path to graduation in middle school and beyond. Since research tells us the keys to school success are attendance, engagement and achievement, we have built the Ocala program to address those very issues. On-site case managers monitor students' grades and attendance carefully; life skills classes keep students engaged and entertained while teaching them about making healthy choices; parent engagement sessions teach families about the importance of being involved with their child's education. Each and every component of the program is aimed to create a supportive community that extends from home to school, giving participants hope for academic success and a bright future.

The Board and staff of ARCC join me in saying thank you for your continued support of the important work we do on behalf of the at-risk youth in our community. Working together, we can ensure that all children have the opportunity to thrive and achieve.

Sincerely,

Patricia Chiapellone  
Executive Director

## The Ocala Mentoring Program at a Glance

The Ocala Middle School Mentoring and Support Services program follows participants for three years, beginning in 6th grade and culminating with their graduation from Ocala Middle School in 8th grade.

### The program offers:

- Mentoring: a responsible adult offers inspiration, advice and enrichment activities to students who often have no positive adult role model in their life.
- Life-skills education: relevant, age-appropriate curriculum on subjects not typically covered in middle school classrooms, such as self-esteem building, anger management, and drug resistance skills.
- Case-management/individual counseling: a highly-trained counselor closely monitors participants' grades, behavior, and attendance, while a masters-level counselor provides therapeutic counseling to those students who need additional emotional support.
- Parent collateral sessions: engaging and educating families about the importance of being involved with their child's academic progress.



*Youth in Ocala Mentoring program pose for a picture at ARCC's Annual Luncheon*

### Enrollment to date:

- 30 incoming 6th graders identified as at-risk to not graduate are beginning their first year of the program.
- 30 7th graders are starting their second year of the program

### Data on the 30 students who piloted the program last year:

- 17 of the 30 participants (57%) had a GPA of 2.5 or greater.
- 8 of the 30 participants (27%) made Honor Roll.
- 98% of the students in the program participated in group mentoring sessions on a biweekly basis.
- The attendance rate for the program is 90%, with an estimated 95% of the students enrolled in the first year expected to return for year two.



*Tiyana, her mother Lorrie, and ARCC Counselor Pete pose for a photo after their speeches at ARCC's Annual Luncheon*

## Spotlight on Success: Tiyana

Before beginning the Ocala Mentoring program Tiyana was a troublemaker at school, talking back to teachers, getting sent to the office, and failing most of her classes. At home, she constantly fought with her mother and lashed out in anger. Given her difficult life, it's no wonder Tiyana acted out. From witnessing drug use and domestic violence, to living in an area riddled with gang violence and growing up amid family conflict, Tiyana has weathered more storms than most adults experience in a lifetime.

It didn't take long for Tiyana to feel the effects of the program's support. With a new appreciation for education, Tiyana raised her grades from all D's and F's to a B average in only one grading period. Now, she aims to make the honor roll and plans to attend college to become a nurse. Her relationship with her mother is much improved, as well. But, perhaps most importantly, the program has provided Tiyana with a person she can trust and confide in, ARCC's counselor and case manager, Pete Hernandez. "He has been a real positive father figure to me, something that I have never had, and has helped me so much."

## Spotlight on Success: Benjamin

For 11-year-old Benjamin Uribe the Ocala Mentoring Program means more fun at school and an easier time in his classes. Currently in 7th grade and in his second year of the program, Benjamin enjoys his group mentoring sessions and weekly life skills education classes. "I like the lessons about things you're not supposed to do, things to stay out of trouble," he says.

Benjamin particularly benefits from group mentoring, where an hour of each session is devoted to homework help. "They just take their time and help you out with your work," says Benjamin. While his grades have steadily improved, program staff is especially impressed with the change in Benjamin's behavior and temper, noting he has received fewer detentions and referrals since beginning the program. "I would always talk back to my teacher," says Benjamin, "I would always just stand up and walk around because I got bored and I thought my work was too hard." Now, even if his work is hard, Benjamin sticks to his work and even spends time studying with a Geometry-buddy in the program.

Last year, Benjamin was one of the few 6th graders in the program who were matched with a one-on-one mentor. His mentor, David, a student at San Jose State, offered Benjamin fun activities such as movies and a Giants game, as well as good advice: stay in school so you can get a good job. Would Benjamin recommend the Ocala program to his friends? "Definitely. It's a way to get help you need to improve your skills and grades."



*Benjamin with ARCC counselor Pete*



*Benjamin with his mentor, David, and other ARCC mentors and mentees, at a SF Giants game*

## The Hidden Rewards of Mentoring

As a newcomer to Silicon Valley, Cisco employee Jason Sidhu was eager to form a connection with his community and familiarize himself with his new home. After seeing ARCC's presentation at a "lunch and learn" volunteer fair at Cisco, he decided that becoming a mentor for an at-risk youth was the perfect solution, "I enjoy working with youth and I wanted to do something that would make a difference and get me out around town doing fun activities."



*Jason and Felize, at the matching ceremony where they first met*

After attending ARCC's mentor orientation session, Jason was paired with 14-year-old Felize who lives in Eastside San Jose with his parents and three siblings. Jason and Felize's friendship progressed as Jason took him to Sharks games, museums, San Francisco, the Monterey Bay Aquarium and on a host of other fun activities. Jason also got to know Felize's mother, who would call Jason to let him know when Felize got in trouble at home or school.

It was during one such phone call that Jason learned that Felize's attitude toward his teachers was getting him a lot of detentions at school. So, Jason had a conversation with Felize about how getting ahead in life sometimes meant doing things you don't want to do. To illustrate his point, he took Felize to work at Cisco one day. There, Felize watched as Jason went to one meeting after another, interacting with his bosses and carrying out assigned tasks. At the end of the day he explained to Felize that even as an adult you have to be able to follow directions and do what is asked of you. It turned out Felize was so impressed by Cisco, he decided he wanted to work there himself someday.



*Jason having fun at the matching ceremony*

Jason credits ARCC with making his first mentoring experience so positive by providing plenty of training and ongoing support. And, it turned out that Jason got exactly what he was looking for when he signed up to become a mentor. "There are a lot of studies about what makes you happy," he says, "It's not money. It's the relationships you have. Getting to know Felize and his family, knowing I have another relationship in this new place I call home makes me feel good."



## Board Member Understands the Value of a Mentor

When Scott Whelton joined ARCC's Board of Directors six years ago he thought it would just be a good way to meet people and get involved with his community. But, he was soon impressed by the Board's vast non-profit experience as well as their friendly, welcoming attitude. Most importantly, Scott was drawn to ARCC's mission to support at-risk youth, "The youth in our programs are typically children who others have given up on," he says, "These youth are very resilient. It only takes a little bit to make a difference for them."



*Scott, Carrie, Finley, and Drake Whelton*

ARCC's mentoring programs are particularly important to Scott, having overcome a difficult childhood with the help of a mentor himself. As trouble found its way into his teen years, Scott found himself enlisting the services of a lawyer. As they soon became friends, Scott began cleaning the lawyer's office after school and his newfound mentor encouraged Scott to graduate from high school and go to college. Inspired by how much the lawyer had accomplished in his life, Scott earned good grades, graduating Magna Cum Laude from the University of Missouri-Columbia, becoming the first member of his family to go to college.

As a father of two and a Partner at Ernst & Young LLP, Scott is very busy. So, making time for Board meetings is not always easy, but it is always worth it. Scott says after every meeting, "I feel enlightened. Every time I attend a board meeting I'm reminded how fortunate I am compared to others. It is not much of a sacrifice to make a difference in the lives of these youth."

## Special Recognitions



Andy Hall of the Grainger Foundation presents ARCC Executive Director Patricia Chiapellone with a \$10,000 check in support of the Ocala Middle School Mentoring program.



ARCC received special recognition on April 14, 2011 from the Alum Rock Union Elementary School District. The award honors the successful collaboration between the district and the agency in creating the Ocala Middle School Mentoring program.



ARCC received special commendation from the San Jose City Council on February 4, 2010 at ARCC's Annual Luncheon.



ARCC received a special commendation from County Supervisor Dave Cortese on February 4, 2010 at ARCC's Annual Luncheon.

## Cisco Foundation and its employees support ARCC



April 21, 2011 Cisco presented a check in the amount of \$1,009 to ARCC. Proceeds came from a percentage of sales over the past year of a Cisco T-shirt that says "I am Cisco" in more than 20 languages.

"Cisco supports Alum Rock Counseling Center because it is dedicated to our community's most underserved students – the kids who need the most help with their studies. ARCC's strong mentoring program at Ocala is inspiring students to succeed—and thrive—as they advance to high school and beyond."

—Ricardo Benavidez, Senior Community Relations Manager, Cisco.



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Elias Chamorro  
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Bob Tolan  
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*From left to right: Anna, Scott, Elias, Bob N., Tom, Patricia, Ruben, Bob T. and Jon*

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*Darcie Green receiving thank you painting on behalf of Kaiser sponsorship for Annual luncheon*



*Meri Maben and her husband Walter Hammon receiving thank you painting for their sponsorship of the Annual Luncheon*



*Steve Guerrero with Gino Belfari, President, Intero Foundation, at ARCC Annual Luncheon*

## Become a Mentor!

ARCC is currently looking for compassionate, committed, fun-loving adults to join our incredible team of mentors. Help us “grow” the leaders of tomorrow by inspiring the youth of today.

If you are interested in finding out about group or individual mentoring opportunities please contact Volunteer Coordinator, Beatriz Ramos, at 408-294-0500 ext. 129 or [bramos@alumrockcc.org](mailto:bramos@alumrockcc.org). Training and support are provided to all mentors throughout the year.



## New Experiences, New Friendships



*Group picture of ARCC youth and their counselors that attended Saratoga Springs Field Trip funded by San Jose North Rotary Club*



*Youth from ARCC's programs put on harnesses in preparation for climbing a tall tree and leaping onto a trapeze. The exercise was one of the activities the youth experienced during a trip to Saratoga Springs, where they learned about trust, perseverance and overcoming fears.*

# ARCC List of Supporters 2010 & 2011

*Thank you all for your support!*

Support ARCC's Ocala Mentoring program by donating online at [www.alumrockcc.org](http://www.alumrockcc.org) or contacting ARCC's development office at 408-240-0070.

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**Alum Rock Counseling Center**

*"Creating responsible adults from East San José's highest risk youth."*

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