



# Connections

A Newsletter for Friends of Homeless Youth Connection

## Homeless Youth Connection Celebrates the Graduation of 105 High School Seniors



**IT'S GRADUATION SEASON** and Homeless Youth Connection (HYC) is celebrating the successful high school careers of more than 100 seniors from schools across the Valley. The mission of HYC is to provide homeless youth with basic needs including hygiene, clothing, case management and housing—so they can focus on school and graduate.

The seniors come from schools across that Valley that HYC currently serves, including 12 high school districts and 50 schools. Among them are several scholarship recipients, a Naval Academy scholar, and a number of students who plan to attend local community colleges, Arizona State University and University of Arizona.

Many of the HYC students have overcome insurmountable odds, including extreme poverty and abusive homes, but with the support of HYC case managers, host families, mentors and staff, they have persevered and completed their schooling.

There are currently no other programs that provide services to homeless students directly at the schools. HYC case managers meet with students during the school day, and this keeps the focus on education. Without support, these youth will live in a chronic state of crisis. HYC is a preventative measure that works to minimize these stressors, giving the youth the ability to focus on school and be successful.

"Statistically, 75 percent of homeless youth drop out of high school. Thanks in part to the HYC team, 83 percent of the seniors in our program have completed their education and have a chance at a brighter future. HYC is having a dramatic impact on the dropout rate in Arizona. We are incredibly proud of the men and women who stayed committed to their education. They understand the importance of a high school diploma and the opportunities that are available to them because they completed this important step in their journey," said Executive Director Dawn Bogart.

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*Giving homeless youth a chance for a brighter future.*

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**DIANA** is currently an only child from Nevada. She lives with her grandmother who has been raising her since she was younger. Both her parents were addicted to drugs and were unable to raise her. While in Nevada, Diana's grandmother lost her job and they were forced to move to Arizona with her aunt, as they could not afford to live in Nevada any longer. Throughout her high school career, Diana has taken AP and honors classes and is graduating from North Canyon High School with a 4.37 GPA. She will be attending University of Southern California majoring in Journalism this upcoming fall. She received the Presidential Scholarship, and Wallis Annenberg Scholarship.



**DOMENIQUE** is a very polite young man. His freshman and sophomore year of high school he lived with his father. However, his 4.21 GPA did not meet his father's standards. Dominique felt like a slave to his father, as he was expected to participate in several groups and activities and maintain the home while his father went to work. Tired of the emotional and verbal abuse of his father, he went to live with his mother. His mother had been dealing with her addiction to drugs throughout his life. They were staying in a hotel and his mother did not come home often. One day his mother called and told him that he needed to be out of the room as she moved in with her boyfriend and would not be returning. Bouncing from friend to friend, Dominique will be graduating with a 4.3 GPA from Paradise Valley High School. Following graduation, he will be attending the Naval Academy in Maryland on a four year scholarship.



**ALYSIA** was recently closed out of the Department of Child Safety due to physical abuse from her mother, and reunified with her father and the rest of her siblings. Alysia is currently a senior at Betty Fairfax with a 3.7 GPA. She is also a member of the International Baccalaureate and in the top 8% of her class. Alysia is also the Vice president of National Honors Society and Dance Club, the head of design committee for International



Baccalaureate Club, and a proud member of Future Business Leaders of America and Rho Kappa History club. In the fall Alysia will be attending the University of Arizona to study Medicine. She has received the Wildcat Excellence Tuition Award Scholarship, and several others.

**LAVENDER** is an 18 year-old teen mom with a seven-month-old son. She is currently living with her former 8th grade teacher, and has been living there for a few months. Lavender was kicked out of her parent's home due to family dynamics and a verbal altercation. She is currently a senior at Camelback High School with a 3.95 GPA. She is ranked 29 out of 400 seniors in her graduating class. She will be attending Arizona State University on a four-year scholarship she received from the Leadership Scholarship Program. Lavender will be majoring in Community Health, which is a part of the Nursing and Health Innovation College at ASU.

**AMY** was told by her family regularly that had to leave her house throughout her Junior and Senior year in high school. She had to leave so frequently, she kept a spare set of clothes and medication for her diabetes at school. The last time she was told not to come home, she went to talk to her Student Resource Officer at school and explained she has nowhere to go. HYC stepped in and quickly found her a Host Family where she has thrived. She no longer lives in fear of where she will sleep at night. Amy is preparing to graduate from Centennial High School and has been awarded scholarships and grants to cover all her expenses at the University of Arizona.

**CARRIE** was mentally abused by her mother to the point that she wanted to end her life. She had anxiety so severely that she could barely speak, had difficulty breathing to the point of passing out, and would not look at anyone in the eye. Carrie's mother had destroyed all her identifying documents, which meant that her entire senior year

she had to work through finding ways to prove her identity and citizenship. She is currently working part time and will attend Estrella Community College in the fall, and she plans to transfer to Grand Canyon University to study Cyber Security. Her goal is to work as a Cyber Security Analyst for the Pentagon and assist with counter-terrorism through Cyber Warfare. Carrie thrived in her Host Family home, and was officially adopted by them at the age of 19.

**JEFF** is a tall, sturdy boy. When he gets in his case manager's car for an appointment he must push the seat all the way back and his knees still push against the dashboard. Jeff's father is in prison and Jeff's mother was in a cycle of drugs and homelessness. As Jeff entered high school, he got tired of living that lifestyle and his friend allowed him to stay at his home. Entering this school year, Jeff still needed a large amount of credits, having coasted through his last year of school without supportive adults in his life. In his fifth year in high school, Jeff was sure he would not graduate. But with the encouragement

and support of his HYC case manager, Jeff is proud to achieve his dream and will be the first person in his family to receive a high school diploma from Buckeye Union High School. His hopes to continue at community college and study music.

**RAMONA** was placed in very destructive situations as a child which caused her to be removed from her parents at a young age. At age 12, she was adopted into another family. She was never truly welcomed at this family and felt that she was allowed to stay there only for the money. (In the state of Arizona, if an older child is adopted the family is given monthly payments.) At age 18, she was pushed out of the adopted family's home and told not to return. Ramona was on the verge of failing school, and depressed to the point of wanting to end her life. With the support of the staff at HYC she received the help she needed, was placed into a Host Family, and is graduating from Liberty High School! She will continue her education at a community college with continued support from her Host Family who have come to love her immensely.

## Church at Sun Valley Sets Graduating Teens Up for Success



Homeless Youth Connection has been so fortunate to be supported by many organizations in our surrounding communities. For the last two years, the wonderful people at the Church at Sun Valley have put together a scholarship program to support our graduating seniors. It started when the mentor of one of our homeless teens was so inspired by her story, effort and success, he decided to do something to

encourage the HYC students' hard work and goal of graduating. Each student awarded the scholarship was given a new laptop computer, a backpack and mouse to start them on the road toward college. This year, the staff at HYC was thrilled to learn that 20 students would be awarded the laptops at graduation.

"The Church at Sun Valley is proud to make these 20 computer scholarship awards to such deserving teens. Our church family came together to raise the needed funds out of love and compassion, and we are honored to reward the students that have exhibited a strong desire to improve their lives and the lives of others," said Church at Sun Valley scholarship representative Dennis Brandt.



### We're getting ready for the new school year

and that means we need supplies for our students! As our program begins to expand across the valley to include even more students in more school districts, we need more resources to help. Hosting a donation drive at your office, church or community group is a wonderful way to help and share the work we are doing at HYC. If you are interested in hosting a donation drive to help bring school supplies to our youth, you can contact our offices for details. Below is a list of the most requested and needed items.

- Binders
- Mechanical pencils and lead
- Folders
- Sharpies
- Highlighters
- Good quality water bottles
- Loose leaf paper
- Graphing paper
- Gift cards for fast food (\$5/\$10)



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[hycaz.org](http://hycaz.org)



## Calendar of Events

Save these dates and mark your calendar with this important list of upcoming HYC events!

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 23, 2017

### Shopping Extravaganza *Outlets at Anthem*

A fun day of shopping and special perks—and HYC will get \$15 of every ticket sold!

Tickets are \$25 each and include exclusive discounts, wine and chocolate tasting, gift bags and lunch!

Call the HYC office to purchase 623-374-3747; limited number of tickets available.

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 26, 2017

### Empowering Youth Breakfast

#### *Tuscany Falls at Pebble Creek*

Be sure to join us from 7:00-8:30 a.m. for this FREE event to learn more about our programs, successes and plans for the upcoming year.



#### OUR NEW ADDRESS:

**9950 W. Van Buren, Suite 114  
Avondale, AZ 85323**

Please remember to update your records and make note of our new location. We're still located in the southwest valley, near 99th Avenue and Van Buren. All other contact info including our phone number will remain the same. Feel free drop by and see our wonderful new office space soon!