

WORCESTER YOUTHBUILD RECOGNIZES TWO OUTSTANDING 2014 GRADUATES ...WHO HAPPEN TO BE SIBLINGS



Pedro Vazquez-Calderon got kicked out of middle school in the 8th grade for something that wasn't his fault. He stayed out of school for four (4) years, and missed out on so much of life that teenagers experience in school. A few years later, his younger sister, Loyda Soto-Calderon, also had a difficult time in middle school, failing 7th grade three (3) times. In her last year, she discovered she was pregnant and her teachers convinced her to drop out, telling her life was going to be far more difficult trying to finish school with a child.

Enter: Training Resources of America, Inc. (TRA), a private, non-profit organization that operates a variety of education, employment, skills training, and workforce development programs throughout Massachusetts, including Worcester YouthBuild.

As the mother of a small child receiving public assistance, Loyda (age 17) first heard about TRA when she was referred to its Young Parents Program. From there, she learned about YouthBuild, and decided to participate in Mental Toughness. Loyda also convinced Pedro (age 22) to join YouthBuild and try to get his life back on track, despite his doubts.

It was especially difficult for Pedro and Loyda, the mother of a then 2-year old son, to come to class every day and meet the demands of YouthBuild because they, along with the rest of their family, were homeless and constantly moving from one place to another - wherever they could find temporary shelter. "We kind of hid it from our teachers till almost the end of the school year because it got to the point where we had to tell them because we were missing school and coming in late. I wish we told them sooner because they helped us get through it a little and they understood our situation," says Loyda.

Despite the obstacles, both Loyda and Pedro exceeded an 80% attendance rate in Worcester YouthBuild. They both earned OSHA 10 and Home Builders Institute Pre-Apprenticeship Certificate Training (PACT) certificates. And they both passed the Massachusetts High School Equivalency Test (HiSET).

The HiSET was particularly challenging for Pedro who entered the program testing at 4th and 5th grade levels in math and reading in the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE). The program director was a little nervous about whether Pedro would be able to make it in the program. But Pedro proved him wrong. Pedro showed up every day, worked his hardest and tried to demonstrate that he could get his High School Equivalency Certificate. After having perfect attendance for the first 5 months, he asked the staff to sign him up for the HiSET. With some trepidation and a lot of hope on the part of staff, Pedro took the Reading and Social Studies tests and passed! Next, he took Math, Science and Writing. After a few days the results arrived, and Pedro had earned his High School Equivalency Certificate!

According to Mike Quigley, TRA-Worcester YouthBuild Program Director, “Pedro is the reason why you give a young person, a second, third, fourth and even fifth chance. He’s the type of person who will have close to perfect attendance, and give all he can give in the classroom. But most of all, it’s the impression he leaves on others. For example: putting a hand out to walk a lady up the stairs, spending time with people he hardly knows to share his story, ... and always demonstrating a positive attitude, smile, and overall quiet personality. Everywhere we go, somebody has something nice to say about Pedro.”

In recognition of Pedro’s special qualities, efforts and outstanding achievements, despite his difficult life circumstances, TRA-Worcester YouthBuild has created the Pedro Vazquez-Calderon YouthBuild Pride Award. It’s an award that will go to future YouthBuild students who display good character, have pride in what they do, and rise above all expectations. It’s an award that will go to a person who can be counted on to help others and who leaves a good impression on everyone he encounters. This plaque will hang in the YouthBuild classroom, and future students, who earn the right, will receive this honor and have their names added to the plaque.



As for Loyda, she was the inspirational student speaker at the Worcester YouthBuild graduation held at Mechanics Hall on October 23, 2014. Says Loyda, “I’m so proud that (Pedro) listened to me (and joined YouthBuild). He doubted himself in the beginning and didn’t think he was going to go through with the program. He told me he was just going to try it out and if he didn’t like it, he would leave the program. Now look at him; he got his High School Equivalency Certificate, landed two jobs, and he achieved so much in one year that made those four years look like

it never happened. I am very proud of him for staying determined to finish this program, and I thank our teachers and our manager, Mike, for motivating him through this year. (Staff) always pushed us to come to school on time, to be responsible, and to finish our work; in class and at the worksite. Thank you TRA and YouthBuild for giving us this opportunity to make a brighter and better future for all of us and our families.”

Where are Loyda and Pedro now?

With a small child, Loyda has struggled with child care issues and finding a stable, permanent home. She and her son have finally settled in Maine with family. She has just started a new, full time job and plans to enroll in college next year where she hopes to pursue a career in nursing. She is grateful for the construction skills she learned. “ Now, I can fix things in my house...I can build anything I need, add an extra room, build a table, or just make shelves to put things on,” says Loyda.

Pedro is currently working two jobs. In January, he will be joining the TRA-Worcester YouthBuild staff as the Assistant Worksite Trainer, serving as a role model and assistant instructor on the worksite project. He will also be assuming a leadership role in the Worcester YouthBuild Policy Committee. His long-term goal is to pursue college in the fall of 2015 and become a Worcester YouthBuild Counselor/ Case Manager.