

IMPACT

LAUNCHING TOWARDS BIGGER DREAMS.



DEDEAUX'S LAUNCH

Making students' dreams a reality through the Dedeaux Youth IMPACT scholarship | p. 4

DREAMING BIGGER

The power of dreaming bigger, why it matters, and advice for the launch to college | p. 5

THE CHOSEN

Meet Dedeaux's 1st class of Youth IMPACT Scholars | p. 6

"It's important to pursue higher education because it empowers us to reach new heights and **pursue new opportunities with impact.**

Maybe I can be different with these new found hard skills. And **being different can help me help the world.**"

-KENNY MOLINA, *San Bernardino HS*

"Whether it's pursuing new ideas, starting new businesses, making new friends - this **authenticity factor is what makes you uniquely you.** And that is something so incredibly special.

Remain brave in sharing this authenticity - because you'll see that **your story will inspire** others too."

-CATHERINE AGUILAR, *Impact Alliances Group, Inc.*

"If we can have more people talk to **women to finish their education, it could be a transformative experience.**

My life has been changing drastically, and it makes me want to **give back to others too** because if I can do it, so can they."

-RAKESHA WILLIAMS, *Inland Career Education Center*

"I never really thought about community service before coming to this Country, and ... it is just really great to see people **ignited** by that same purpose [community service] **come together to serve.**"

-WALDO VADO, *Pacific HS*

"... I **choose to face my fears.** No one in my family has taken this path that I'm about to take. And as the first in my family to pursue higher education, **I hope to be a role model** to my family and other minority women that **making our dreams a reality is possible.**"

-PAOLA MARTINEZ,
Sierra HS

"Making an **impact** means making an **improvement in people's lives,** and I'm looking forward to achieving meaningful impact by pursuing bioengineering."

-ERICK MENDOZA,
Arroyo HS

"I just picture all the little disabled girls like me. I want to be that **source of hope** and **inspiration** of letting them know that they can do anything and that they are not alone... Because really, **disabled people can too**. It shouldn't just be "normal" people who are the only ones who can make their dreams into reality."

-STEPHANIE VARGAS, Indian Springs HS

"I hope to continue making a **meaningful impact** in my community by **volunteering**.

What really interests me is helping out in an animal shelter... I want to be able to help animals live in a safe comfortable environment and find good homes for them to be adopted in."

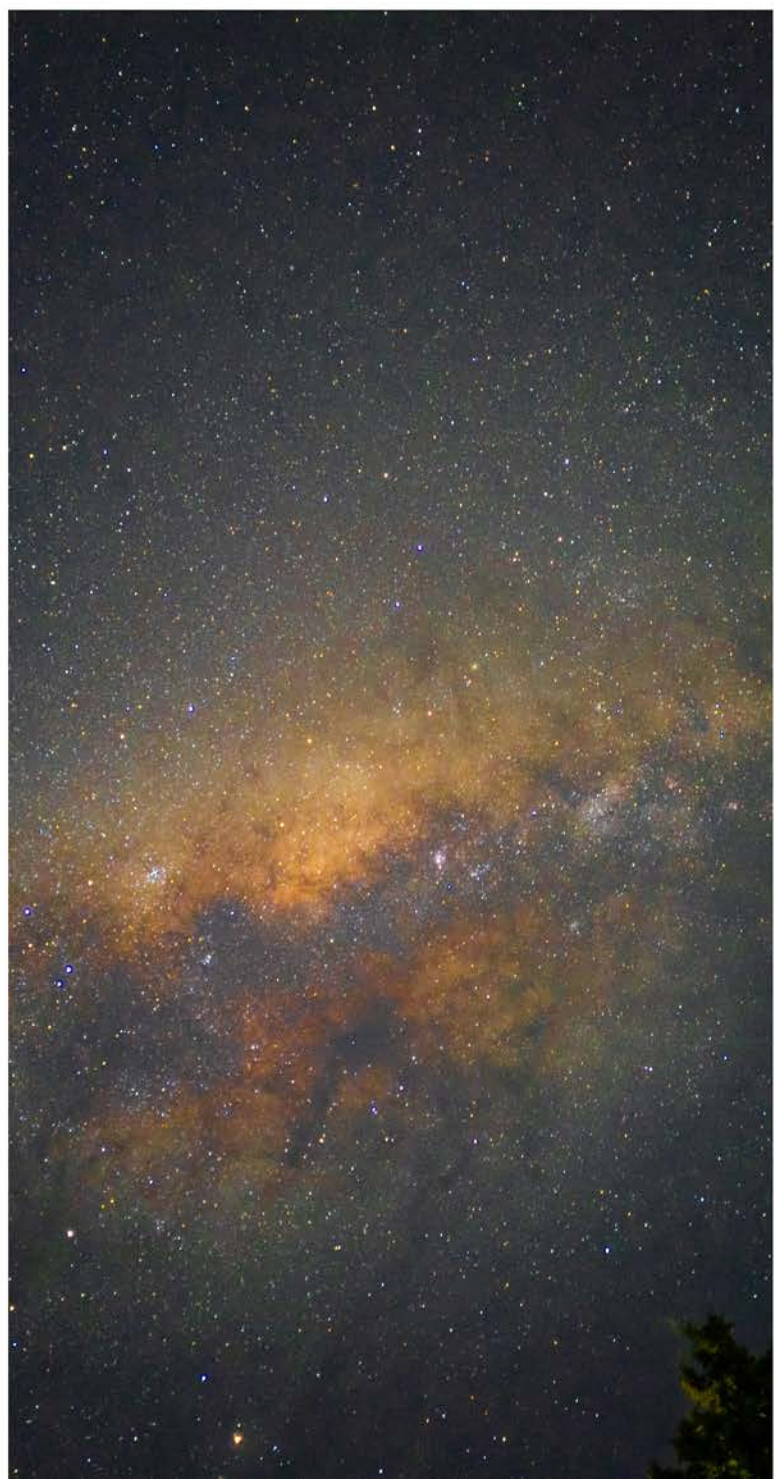
-ARLENE RODRIGUEZ, Middle College HS

"... you have to be there for yourself and work hard. **Show yourself that you really want this**, and pursuing **college will help you launch towards your bigger dreams**.

It's important to dream bigger because it will always help you push yourself towards what you (and this world) needs."

-SKYLER AYALA, Cajon HS

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Leadership Letter

The Launch

At Dedeaux Properties, we have a deep commitment to making an IMPACT that matters. By serving as a partner to our local and global communities, we are able to create hope, change, and strength in numerous Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) areas.

This year, our team has had a large focus on contributing towards SDG-4 Quality Education. For the first quarter of 2023, we contributed approximately \$33,500 through local scholarship programs throughout the Inland Empire.

For the second quarter of 2023, we partnered with the San Bernardino Community Scholarship Association in launching our **Dedeaux Youth IMPACT Scholarship!** The Dedeaux Youth IMPACT Scholarship is special to our team because it commemorates the values of our Founder, Rod Dedeaux. Rod Dedeaux was an entrepreneur who dreamed big and aspired to make a difference in all of his pursuits.

Dedeaux Youth IMPACT Scholars embody the very hopes and dreams that our world needs. Our chosen scholars are big **dreamers, explorers, and adventurers** striving to make a **meaningful IMPACT in the world.**

Our team is excited to celebrate the first class of Dedeaux Youth IMPACT Scholars with this issue, and wishes them all the best as they launch towards making their bigger dreams a reality.

With Gratitude,



Jessica Pisula

Director of Marketing
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Editor's Letter

The Dream



Catherine Aguilar

CEO & Founder

Impact Alliances Group, Inc.

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I remember my final moments of high school. It was a mixed bag of bittersweet and exciting emotions all at once. Leaving my hometown and going to college was scary for sure, but I had bigger dreams of making an IMPACT that matters. And like many of our Dedeaux Youth IMPACT Scholars, the next step I knew I had to take was equipping myself with the knowledge and skills I needed to make my dreams a reality.

If someone were to tell my 18 year old self some of the incredible things that were waiting for me in my next chapter (e.g. being selected as part of the 1% to intern for the Obama Administration first as the President's Scheduling & Advance Intern, and later as one of his Community Engagement Interns; being the first in my family to graduate with a Masters degree from an Ivy League; giving a TED talk on the Power of Norm Breaking; and birthing my own business) – I'm not sure I would have believed them!

But that's the thing with dreams and when you do everything in your power to protect them. **Your dreams will take you on the most amazing journeys.** You'll see yourself **transform** in the process as you refine your gifts and talents, strengthen the dream's **vision**, and **expand** your dream's **impact** in making this world a better place.

I am proud to be a part of Dedeaux Properties efforts in making an IMPACT, and join the team in celebrating the **diversity, dreams**, and the courage to be **different** amongst their first class of Dedeaux Youth IMPACT Scholars.

For this issue of IMPACT, I got to sit down with each of the Scholars and learn more about how Dedeaux's support in their launch is going to make a meaningful difference in making their dreams a reality. I found each conversation inspiring, and I hope it leaves you with inspiration to be brave in dreaming big too!

To our 2023 Dedeaux Youth IMPACT Scholars, I leave you with this - there will never be anything as fulfilling as making a difference in somebody else's life. Take your creativity, curiosity, integrity, and higher education to make a difference in this world. Embrace your ambitions and new ideas. Our world needs audacious thinkers and big dreamers like you.

Yours Truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Catherine Aguilar".

MEET WALDO VADO

**Pacific High School,
Dedeaux Youth IMPACT
Scholar**

Meet Dedeaux Youth IMPACT Scholar, Waldo Vado. Waldo's fire to make a meaningful impact through his passion of serving others is very much alive.

So much of our conversation centered around his excitement to explore the new - new places, people, opportunities, the world. In this conversation, Waldo shared more about what this scholarship means to him and his commitment to make a difference in his community.

AGUILAR: In your scholarship essay, you spoke about the importance of community service and your passion to serve others. How did this passion start for you?

VADO: I moved from Central America, and back there, we didn't have much of the culture for community service that is so present in this Country. I never really thought about community service before coming to this Country, and so I was kind of surprised that serving others through community service was natural for me!

Once I moved here, I got involved in



organizations as much as I could. My first big role in community service was with Pureland Foundation. A great amount of kids would come together to serve food to those in need. We'd put food packages together, and it was just really great to see people ignited by that same purpose come together to serve.

AGUILAR: You're currently involved with Best Buddies International (BBI), an organization dedicated to providing companionship and support to people with special needs. Can you tell me more about your involvement with BBI?

VADO: Right now I'm serving as the Chapter President of BBI for this school year.

Last year when the seniors were graduating, the BBI coordinator asked me if I'd want to be the President. In that moment I didn't hesitate and said, "Of Course!"

It's been an amazing and challenging experience. My job is to help others serve. I started a lot of new initiatives to make BBI more appealing to high school students and increased the scope of our objectives. I've also increased the diversity of the kind of people who get involved in the organization.

For example, one of the initiatives that I'm most proud of is the community service initiative that is a way for students to quantify the community service time they do. BBI gives students a visual report at the end of the year with all their community service time, and they can use this resource wherever and

whenever they want.

I gave a new life to BBI by bringing in a lot of new people like freshmen and sophomores who normally don't want to be that involved in this kind of organization. I've also brought in involvement from diverse ethnic groups into BBI like Hispanics, Latinos, and African Americans. I'm really proud of this diversity.

AGUILAR: How are you going to be translating this passion of serving others in college and beyond?

VADO: Formally, I would like to be a BBI Ambassador at any college. I want to use my college experience to get involved in new community

service opportunities, expand my network, and really take advantage of getting all the new opportunities a college experience comes with.

AGUILAR: Why is pursuing higher education important to you?

VADO: It's important because it would lead to opportunities that I wouldn't be able to find elsewhere.

AGUILAR: As a Dedeaux Youth IMPACT Scholar, how will you be making a meaningful impact in your community and in the world?

VADO: I've been looking forward to different possibilities. I know that I've mentioned that I love BBI, and that it is a real possibility in my future. But



Jessica and Catherine attended the Pacific High School Donor Luncheon to celebrate Waldo's Dedeaux Youth IMPACT Scholarship award.

outside of this, I've been thinking that maybe I can get involved in educating children about this path to higher education. I've done this kind of counseling before amongst BBI members.

AGUILAR: Tell me about the moment you found out that you were selected as a Dedeaux Youth IMPACT Scholar.

VADO: I couldn't believe it - for real! I was like, "Oh my gosh. I won my first scholarship!"

The way I found out was that Mrs. Perez told me that I was selected as our high school's Dedeaux Youth IMPACT scholar and Ms. Aguilar will be meeting with me about my feature in the IMPACT magazine. And I said yes, yes, yes - let's do it! My family is so happy for me.

AGUILAR: What advice do you have for other students at Pacific HS?

Take all the opportunities you can because there is always a way for your dreams to come true. That's what I did.

My dream was to get into higher education. I took every opportunity that I could. I got involved in organizations, sports, and took new classes. I did everything in my power and it was all worth it.



Waldo was chosen to represent Pacific High School in the news program, Telemundo, where he talked about about the school's advanced technology and transportation building.

MEET KENNY MOLINA

**San Bernardino High
School, Dedeaux Youth
IMPACT Scholar**

Meet Dedeaux Youth IMPACT Scholar, Kenny Molina. Kenny is an entrepreneur who has a big heart.

So much of our conversation was sprinkled with Kenny's insight on success being about the journey, not the end destination. He also shared about how beautiful life is when we're brave enough to pursue the "new" and courageously share our most authentic self.

AGUILAR: Tell me about how you're making an impact today and how you aspire to make an impact after graduating high school.

MOLINA: I would love to make an impact by sharing my story with people. At the age of 16, I helped my mom start Locksmith Auto Express. I have a talent of being an artist and love designing things. I run the social media, operations, and sales / marketing of our business. I'm proud to share that our business has been doing pretty well! We started locally in the Inland Empire and we've grown to provide services out to Orange County.



I hope my journey would inspire people to create their own business and be their own boss by pursuing something that they genuinely like. When you're brave enough to go on this journey of creating your own business, it's a transformational and special path that makes you a better person because you're discovering your special skills and constantly refining it.

AGUILAR: As you get ready for your next big chapter, what advice do you have for other students at your high school?

MOLINA: I would say don't worry about it and have confidence about the big things ahead. You're bound to run into obstacles in your journey, but know that there are so many different ways to overcome the challenges life presents. Just stay calm, don't worry, and trust that it will all work out for the best. Success is a gradual process.

When I first started Locksmith Auto Express, I didn't know how to talk to customers and I didn't know how the job I had created for myself was going to be. But things ended up working out well in the end!

AGUILAR: What are some of your current thoughts and feelings about this new chapter ahead of you? I'm sure it's a little bittersweet to wrap up high school, but exciting at the same time because you're launching towards your dreams and the goals you've set out for yourself.

MOLINA: This whole experience was a roller coaster for me because there was quarantine, a lot of people wearing masks, different friendships,

and new relationships. My grades were a roller coaster too!

I eventually learned from my mistakes, and that school really matters. I realized that at some point, I do need to go to college. I want to make my parents proud and do something meaningful with my business.

High school was an incredible experience and it taught me so much. It was tough, it was lovely, it was nice, and there were moments that made me appreciate life more. All these moments in high school made me stronger and more knowledgeable in different things.

The memories I made in high school were really beautiful and, sadly, not all things can last forever. I just know that in this moment, I can appreciate all these memories that I've made here.

AGUILAR: Now that your next chapter is focused on college, can you share more about why pursuing higher education is important and what it means to you?

MOLINA: I think it's important to pursue higher education because it empowers us to reach new heights and pursue new opportunities with impact.

Higher education is a tool to help us gain the skills and knowledge we need for the jobs and careers we want to pursue.

AGUILAR: Have you decided which college you'll be going to and what major you'll be taking?



Kenny was presented the Dedeaux Youth IMPACT Scholarship award by Catherine at the San Bernardino HS Scholarship Ceremony. Kenny's mom joined for a pic and cheered proudly for her son

MOLINA: I'm going to be going to Cal State LA and will major in computer science.

AGUILAR: Congratulations! What are you excited about most for your college journey?

MOLINA: Thank you. There's a lot of things that I'm excited about!

I'm most excited about the fact that I won't be alone at Cal State LA because my best friend since middle school will be there. We've always kept in touch, but have had this physical distance since I'm in San Bernardino and he's all the way in LA. We're like brothers, and I'm happy to finally be united with him.

Another thing that I'm excited about are the things that I will learn. What I'm aiming for in life is for me to be able to make my own computer science products. I know that this will require refined and new skills, and ultimately it would bring me many opportunities.

Maybe I can be different with these new found hard skills. And being different can help me help the world.

I'm also excited for the experiences with new friends and learning about their life goals. I love asking the question of, "Why - why are you pursuing what you're pursuing?". As a business owner, there must be motivation because when you get motivation, you really launch towards incredible opportunities.

AGUILAR: What is that fire in you that keeps you going everyday as you continue to balance school, running your business, helping

your mom, and maintaining friendships?

MOLINA: Well first of all, there's this inspiration from my grandparents, uncles, and brother. They all have their own businesses. A second inspiration point for me is being able to learn something new everyday.

In this journey, I'm learning so much about different cars and effectively interacting with different types of people. There are new skills I have that not many others have, which is pretty cool.

AGUILAR: What was your reaction when you found out that you were selected as one of the Dedeaux Youth IMPACT Scholars?

MOLINA: I found out during 2nd period class and I mean - I just didn't expect it!

I didn't expect it because my scholarship essay was pure heart and soul. Sometimes people pour out their hearts and they just don't get anything. But this time I did, and I got a scholarship out of it. I'm just thinking how incredible it all is. I told my mom that I got my own bank account now because I got a scholarship! She was so happy that she even told my grandma in Nicaragua. They were both really happy for me. It seems like this was a blessing from God.

I also told my dad and friends about the scholarship and they all said this is amazing, and how proud they are of me.

I never expected to have a scholarship like this, and now I'm here.

AGUILAR: That is so awesome. Your authenticity and courage to share your unique journey really shined through for the Dedeaux Properties team.

I want to encourage you to remain brave in continuing to share your heart in all the things you do. Whether it's pursuing new ideas, starting new businesses, making new friends - this authenticity factor is what makes you uniquely you. And that is something so incredibly special.

So, remain brave in sharing this authenticity - because you'll see that your story will inspire others too.



Kenny and his theatre group friends pose in character post-showtime.



Kenny and friends at the San Bernardino High School Homecoming.

M E E T

S T E P H A N I E

V A R G A S

**Indian Springs High School,
Dedeaux Youth IMPACT
Scholar**

Meet Dedeaux Youth IMPACT Scholar, Stephanie Vargas. Stephanie is a trailblazer focused on making the mental health space more accessible in the Inland Empire.

In our conversation, Stephanie shares more about her personal disability, and how her disability served as a source of inspiration to launch towards her dreams of becoming a counseling psychologist.

AGUILAR: I heard you gave a very moving presentation in class today - can you tell me more about it?

VARGAS: Yes! The presentation assignment we were given was to present on any topic. So, I shared about my disability and spoke on disabilities in general.

I spoke about how people with disabilities aren't really seen as sources of inspiration. I first shared about my personal disability stage 3 spina bifida, which is a birth disorder that involves the incomplete development of the spine. There are veins



that go through a hole in my spine, and it creates this bubble on my (lower back) - this just messes up my whole body. Usually people born with stage 3 come out deformed, dead, need to use a wheelchair, or they're put in special ed classes.

I also talked about Assessment of Basic Language and Learning Skills (i.e. ABLLS, an educational tool used frequently with applied behavior analysis to measure the basic linguistic and functional skills of an individual with developmental delays or disabilities) and highlighted some words to avoid like spaz, midget, and retarded.

AGUILAR: You mentioned that your teacher said the presentation could be on anything. Why did you choose to speak about disabilities?

VARGAS: I chose to speak about disabilities in general because I'm very passionate about it. I wanted to use my presentation as an opportunity to better educate people on disabilities and create allies for the disabled community.

Growing up, I always felt alone when it came to my disability. I didn't really see many disabled people in my life and so I want people to understand what it's like to be disabled and how they can help better the community.

AGUILAR: A quality that Dedeaux Youth IMPACT Scholars have is that they are unafraid to dream big. How did you not let your disability stop you from dreaming big for yourself? In other words, how did you protect that hope, happiness, and joy inside of you? I imagine that was really tough.

VARGAS: I just picture all the little disabled girls like me. I want to be that source of hope and inspiration of letting them know that they can do anything and that they are not alone. I've never had a disabled role model in my life...

I've had Latina role models and women role models, but I haven't had any disabled role models. I want little girls to see on TV and on social media other disabled role models and think, 'Oh, she has braces like me!' or 'Oh, she's in a wheelchair just like me. And if she can do it, I can do it too!'

Because really, disabled people can too. It shouldn't just be "normal" people who are the only ones who can make their dreams into reality.

AGUILAR: As a role model to the community of people with disabilities, what are traits you hope to embody as you continue on in your journey?

VARGAS: Hope, strength, and peace.

Hope because you can only go so far with discipline.

Strength because you have to get out of bed. You can't let your thoughts and feelings control you or dictate what you can/can't do.

Peace because I know what it's like living with thoughts of being different and feeling left out. But you have to learn to be ok with that. It's about learning how to be ok being disabled and being different.

AGUILAR: You mentioned in your scholarship essay that you aspire to be a counseling psychologist.



Stephanie and Catherine at Indian Springs High School's Counselors Office - Stephanie's new favorite spot since it was the location where her advisor shared that she was selected as one of the Dedeaux Youth IMPACT Scholars!

Can you share what sparked this interest?

VARGAS: I grew up in a home where it was normal not to express emotions. My parents were never taught by their parents to properly express their emotions.

As a child that's all we truly want - to be showered with love and to be embraced with endless love. Unfortunately, that was not the case for me. Instead, all that was left was the feeling of sadness and loneliness. For this very reason, it has motivated me to become a counseling psychologist with the hopes that I will open up my own practice and give back to my community.

For the longest time, I grew up feeling discouraged and at a disadvantage because I grew up as a person with a disability. Becoming the representation I wanted growing up can help inspire the younger generation that they can achieve their dreams. This means my community will feel more seen and more understood by their stories, which is what a counseling psychologist can provide.

Counseling psychologists make their patients feel heard, and I hope I can be that for them.

AGUILAR: Congrats on your Dedeaux Youth IMPACT Scholarship, Stephanie. Thank you for being so brave in sharing your story and journey in dreaming big, and how you aspire to make an impact in the world. Your journey is so beautiful and the Dedeaux team is excited to support you in launching towards your next big step - college. Congrats!



Stephanie at her University of Riverside Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) Graduation. AVID is an elective that prepares students for college.



2023 Senior Prom.



Younger Stephanie playing outside while practicing with her walker.

MEET ERICK MENDOZA

Arroyo High School,
Dedeaux Youth IMPACT
Scholar

Meet Dedeaux Youth IMPACT Scholar, Erick Mendoza. Erick is an innovator who is passionate about helping others as an aspiring biomedical engineer.

As a first generation student, Erick shared why launching towards higher education matters, what success means to him, and how he's aiming to make a meaningful impact in the world.

AGUILAR: I'd love to start off by hearing about the moment you found out that you were selected as a Dedeaux Youth IMPACT Scholar. What were the thoughts that were running through your mind and how did you find out?

MENDOZA: I was super surprised! I immediately told my friends and mom that I got the scholarship, and that I'll be featured in Dedeaux's IMPACT magazine.

Everyone was so happy for me and they're all excited to see my magazine feature.

AGUILAR: Can you shine light on how



you aspire to make a meaningful impact in our society and why that's important to you?

MENDOZA: I want to go into the medical field and pursue bioengineering to help people. I get excited about the idea of being the one innovating machines to help make medicines that will be used to heal people.

AGUILAR: What sparked your interest in bioengineering?

MENDOZA: I'm from El Salvador. Back in my home country, I grew up seeing so much of my community needing medical help. El Salvador is not an affluent country, and seeing people in medically helpless situations made me really sad.

So, I decided that I'm going to do something about it. Making an impact means making an improvement in people's lives, and I'm looking forward to achieving meaningful impact by pursuing bioengineering.

AGUILAR: Why is pursuing higher education important to you?

MENDOZA: Pursuing higher education is the next step I know I need to take to succeed because it will equip me with the technical skills I need for a career in bioengineering. I love helping people and innovating. Bioengineering is a path that I can see myself truly enjoying. If I'm loving every moment of the job and my journey, then I think that's what true success is.

Also, I am the first in my family to go to college. As a first generation college student, finishing college is an important part of fulfilling my

bigger dreams. I also have a little brother who looks up to me, and I want to do everything I can to inspire him to be better and reach higher.

It's all a lot and good at the same time. I'm a little nervous to be honest!

AGUILAR: There is so much to be excited about! Some encouragement that I can offer you is that you're never alone in whatever journey you choose to pursue. One way you can seek guidance on new pathways is seeking mentorship. I've gotten to where I am today because I have sought mentorship in so many different areas of my life - whether it be academic, personal, or career.

crucial role in helping me acclimate to this very different environment compared to the environment I'm used to back at my home country.

AGUILAR: As you get ready for your next big chapter, what advice would you have for other first generation students who are aspiring to go to college?

MENDOZA: Be dedicated! Nothing is too hard.

AGUILAR: Any shout outs you'd like to give in your spotlight feature?

MENDOZA: I want to thank my parents for everything that they've done for me. Moving here wasn't easy, but I have always felt supported by them. My parents helped me get to where I am today.



Erick and the Arroyo High School Digital Media Academy at the Disneyland Design Group Leadership Summit.

Seeking mentorship is a great strategy for navigating through your own journey, especially when you're the first in your family to take a new path. It'll help you gain confidence in moving forward in your journey because if your mentor did it, you can too!

MENDOZA: Absolutely. I feel like my greatest mentor has been my AVID teacher. He's been there with me since the beginning of my journey at Arroyo High School and has played a

MEET RAKESHA WILLIAMS

**Inland Career Education
Center, Dedeaux Youth
IMPACT Scholar**

Meet Dedeaux Youth IMPACT Scholar, Rakesha Williams. Rakesha is a wife, mother of three, and a woman who has remained focused on launching towards her dreams of becoming a registered nurse.

It's been what feels like a long road for Rakesha, and so much of her journey has required resilience and persistence in protecting the light inside of her. Growing up with an incarcerated parent, constant moving, and eventually getting separated from family are just a few of the obstacles that have stood in her way.

Rakesha's journey is a beautiful one that speaks to the truth that success is not about the destination - it's about remaining resilient and enjoying the journey.

AGUILAR: You are juggling family, career, school - how are you doing it all?

WILLIAMS: I just know where I want to get. Also I know my kids are going to benefit from everything I'm doing, and it gives me



newfound strength to keep plowing forward.

I've always had this dream of becoming a nurse and for so many years, I've felt like I couldn't do it. But I've been through a lot and I've accomplished a lot. I reached this point where it feels like I'm going to be a nurse, and it's going to happen no matter what.

Even going to the grocery store, for example, is a task that gets done because my mindset is set that it's a task that will help me become a nurse and make my dream a reality.

AGUILAR: What sparked your dream of becoming a nurse?

WILLIAMS: Helping people! I used to go to the hospitals a lot as a child, and so I would always see nurses.

I felt like the hospital was the place where I got the most love and attention. I knew that I probably wasn't the only child who felt that... And so I wanted to pursue nursing to be that source of love and attention for other children.

I have a heart for serving others, and it started at a really early age.

AGUILAR: How are you making an impact now on a micro level?

WILLIAMS: At home I instill the value of sharing. My two boys, Ashton and Clayton, take lunch to school and I always express the importance of sharing. When we go to the grocery store they ask for extra snacks to give to other kids and I say yes! It's the thoughtfulness for me because sharing is a value I know that I'm



Rakesha and Catherine at the 2023 ICEC Graduation Ceremony. Rakesha graduated with high honors and was awarded three scholarships, including the Dedeaux Youth IMPACT Scholarship.

helping instill in them.

Everybody needs help. My boys ask me a lot of questions on the homelessness around us. I explain to them that just because that they are homeless doesn't mean that they're not smart or not loved. It just means that they are having a hard time, and I encourage my boys to pray for them and help out with their allowance when they can.

AGUILAR: How are you aspiring to make a larger impact?

WILLIAMS: After college, I'd love to start a non-profit that focuses on helping women continue education. My non-profit would provide mentorship in guiding women to help them understand that there are options in continuing their education and that they are not alone in their journey.

High school for me was really tough. But coming to ICEC changed my whole perspective of school. Meeting older people who were in the same age group as me gave me newfound confidence.

If we can have more people talk to women to finish their education, it could be a transformative experience. My life has been changing drastically, and it makes me want to give back to others too because if I can do it, so can they.

AGUILAR: Can you share more about the non-profit that you have today?

WILLIAMS: I have a non-profit called Us First that serves women who have husbands or children who are incarcerated.

My father was incarcerated for about

half my life, and my husband was incarcerated when I was pregnant with my children. So I have a soft spot and know the ins and outs of incarceration.

Us First helps with groceries, bills, car rides to and from facilities to alleviate some of the stress that these women face.

AGUILAR: Who would you say is your role model today and why?

WILLIAMS: Taraji P. Henson! She did an amazing job with her son. He graduated as one of the top college graduates. Also, she came to Los Angeles with \$700 in her pocket and she is now a multi-millionaire business woman.

She dealt with a lot of trauma as well. But regardless, Taraji stayed so strong and true to her passion for acting that she made it. She always says, "Just because you have trauma age group as me gave me newfound confidence.

If we can have more people talk to women to finish their education, it could be a transformative experience. My life has been changing drastically, and it makes me want to give back to others too because if I can do it, so can they.

AGUILAR: Tell me about the moment you found out that you were selected as one of the Dedeaux Youth IMPACT Scholars. What was running through your mind and how did you feel?

WILLIAMS: It was crazy! My daughter is four, and she always has my phone until it dies. I finally got my phone and charged it. I saw that I had seven

unread text messages and one of the texts towards the top of my phone said that I got the scholarship! That was the moment I just lost it and I cried. I'm very thankful.

My husband was home when I found out that I got the scholarship. I literally jumped on him and told him I got the scholarship, haha. And not just one of the scholarships I applied to... All three!

I group called all my family and they are just so proud. I am the only one in my family - out of a long generation - going to college.

AGUILAR: What would your advice be for others who have had long journeys like yourself, but also want to pursue higher education?

WILLIAMS: Just do it. Do it! Try not to think about what was before. Think about what's coming next.

Also, enjoy the journey. Don't think about the end goal too much. Know that it's coming, and look at the journey as a whole. Get excited for what's next.

AGUILAR: Exactly. You've got to fall in love with the process, not just the end destination. Castles aren't built overnight. Great things take time.

WILLIAMS: Yes yes yes! It's the process of building and the memories that come with it. It's amazing to me.

AGUILAR: Are there any special shout outs you'd like to give?

WILLIAMS: Yes. Shout out to ICEC and the teachers - especially Ms. Mitchell. She pushed me! Ms. Mitchell

is an older African American woman and I always find myself gravitating to older African American women because I feel like they are paving the way for me.

Also I would love to thank the Dedeaux Properties team and of course you, Ms. Catherine Aguilar! Thank you all for the opportunity and the honor of being selected as a Dedeaux Youth IMPACT Scholar.

It's going to be a long journey of creating impact, and I hope to give back to others and future generations.



Family and education are the pinnacle of Rakesha's success.

MEET ARLENE RODRIGUEZ

**Middle College High School,
Dedeaux Youth IMPACT
Scholar**

Meet Dedeaux Youth IMPACT Scholar, Arlene Rodriguez. Arlene is the first in her family to go to college, and she is ready to launch towards her next step at Cal Poly!

In our conversation, Arlene shares more on about her passion for serving others, her love for animals, and how she aspires to make a meaningful impact in the world.

AGUILAR: What are you looking forward to the most after graduating high school?

RODRIGUEZ: After graduating, I look forward to going to college the most. What excites me is the idea of starting a new journey and meeting new people. By going to college I can finally use all of the skills that I learned in high school to do something good with my life and become closer to my goal of becoming a veterinarian.

AGUILAR: Why is pursuing higher education important to you?

RODRIGUEZ: Pursuing higher education is very important because it opens up a world of amazing opportunities for the future. It is important to me because it helps in



increasing my knowledge and allows me to develop essential skills that I may need in my desired career.

AGUILAR: As a Dedeaux Youth IMPACT Scholar, how will you be making a meaningful impact?

RODRIGUEZ: I hope to continue making a meaningful impact in my community by volunteering.

What really interests me is helping out in an animal shelter because it kind of connects to my desired career. I want to be able to help animals live in a safe comfortable environment and find good homes for them to be adopted in. It's often seen how domestic animals like dogs and cats are crossing the street risking their lives in getting hit by vehicles and I want to be able to help my community by preventing that.



Arlene at Middle College HS Club Rush promoting Key Club - an organization that provides opportunities to serve the community.

AGUILAR: Tell me about the moment you found out that you were selected as one of the Dedeaux Youth IMPACT Scholars for your high school.

RODRIGUEZ: When I found out I was selected as one of the Dedeaux Youth IMPACT Scholars for my high school,



Arlene, family, and Catherine at Middle College HS ready to celebrate Arlene's Dedeaux Youth IMPACT Scholarship!

I was randomly called out of my English class by my counselor. At first I was nervous, I kind of had a feeling that it had something to do with the scholarship, but I wasn't sure if it was going to be good or bad news.

When I found out I was selected, I felt very happy and excited because it's the first scholarship I have ever received!

Then, I called my mom and shared my excitement with her. When I first called her, she actually got a little scared because I only call during school for emergencies. But when I broke the news, she was happy and told me how proud she was of me.

I went back into class and told my friends, and they got really excited as well. One of them said we needed to celebrate the moment and baked brownies for us to eat the next day!

AGUILAR: As you get ready for your next big chapter, what advice do you have for other students at your high school?

RODRIGUEZ: Some advice I'd give to other students at my high school is to utilize your resources and opportunities. If you are struggling with something, it's always okay to ask for help. There are programs, clubs, teachers, all willing to provide you with the help you need so it is important to use the help and not wait or try to figure things out on your own.

Another important piece of advice is to remind yourself why you're here and how hard it was for you to get there. As difficult as times get, giving up now will mean all your hard work was for nothing, so it is important to understand that challenges are only temporary and your efforts will all be worth it in the end.

MEET

PAOLA

MARTINEZ

Sierra High School, Dedeaux
Youth IMPACT Scholar

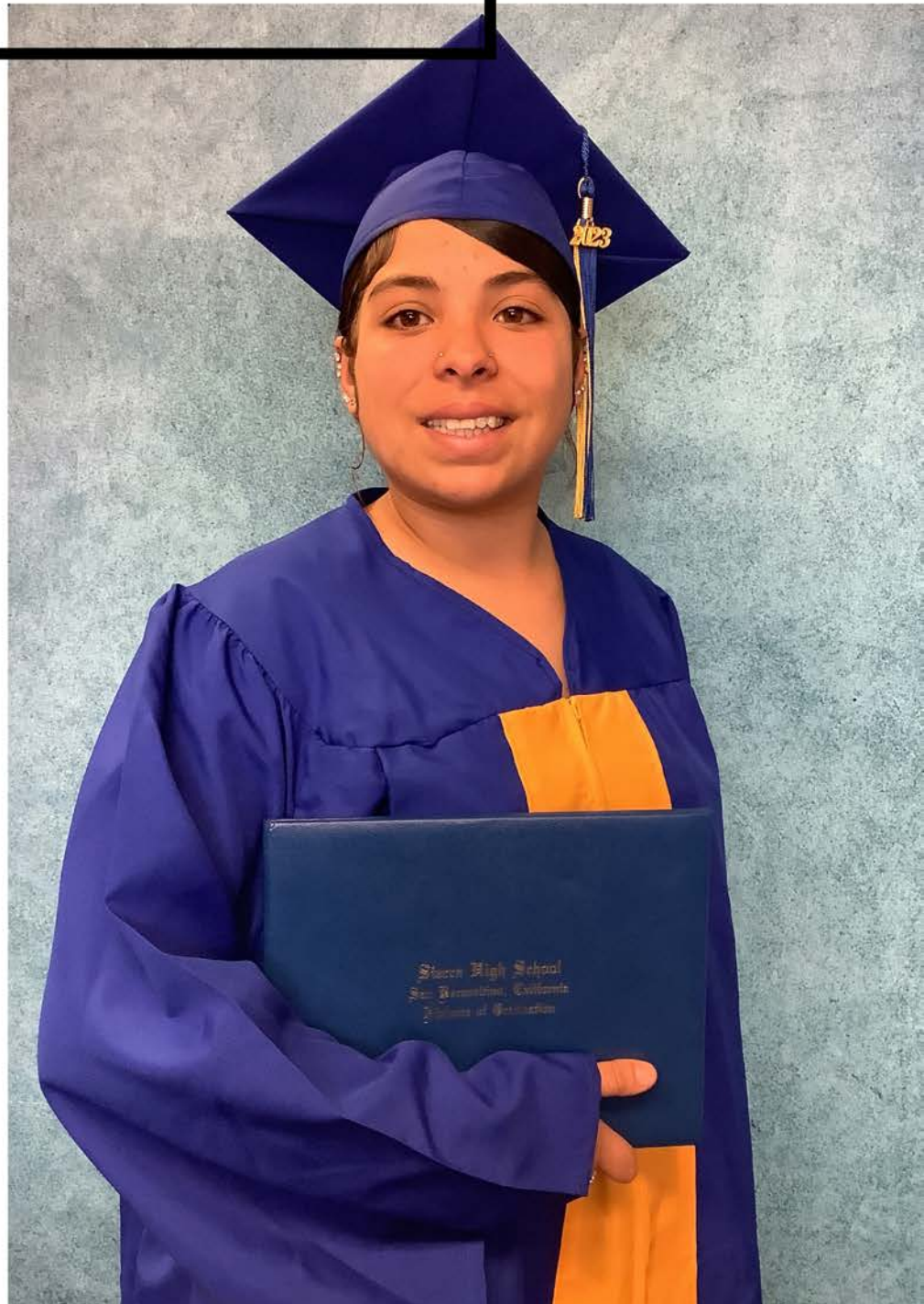
Meet Dedeaux Youth IMPACT Scholar, Paola Martinez. Paola is a driven woman focused on working towards her dream of becoming a detective.

Paola wants to make a local impact by solving crimes in her community and doing everything she can to create a safe environment for everyone. She hopes to make a global impact by inspiring other women to be fearless in chasing after their big dreams and pursuing opportunities.

AGUILAR: What sparked your drive towards your dream of becoming a detective?

MARTINEZ: I have always wanted to be a detective to help solve crimes in my community, and I became interested in this career when a detective came to my house because my dad was shot in a drive by shooting.

When I saw the detective taking pictures and asking the neighbors if they saw anything, it sparked my initial interest. In that moment, I understood that I could be a



part of the solution to these problems. I want to be a detective so that I can help those in my community get justice for crimes committed against their loved ones. I also want to help prevent crime in the community so that what happened to my dad will not have to happen to others.

AGUILAR: What are you looking forward to the most after graduating high school?

MARTINEZ: I'm really looking forward to going straight to college so I can start taking steps towards my dream of becoming a detective.

First I'll be attending San Bernardino Valley College. When I turn 21, I'll be working towards becoming a police officer by completing my educational requirements at Police Academy. After I graduate Police Academy, I'd be able to attend Detective Academy - it's an exciting journey!

Initially I was a little scared to become a police officer, especially because there aren't many women police officers or detective.

But I told myself that I choose to face my fears. No one in my family has taken this path that I'm about to take. And as the first in my family to pursue higher education, I hope to be a role model to my family and other minority women that making our dreams a reality is possible.

AGUILAR: That is amazing. I think your journey is so important because you're creating legacy and doing impact work. You're showing others that women can do it too - that is so exciting and such an



Paola was presented the Dedeaux Youth IMPACT Scholarship award by Catherine at the Sierra HS Award Ceremony. Paola's mom and siblings joined for a pic routed proudly.

empowering journey in itself.

Tell me about the moment you found out that you were selected as a Dedeaux Youth IMPACT Scholar.

MARTINEZ: I was in second period class, and Mrs. Coston called me in to share the news that I was selected as our school's Dedeaux Youth IMPACT Scholar.

I was shocked and excited! After school, I told my mom and all my friends. They are all so proud of me.

One thing my mom told me recently that has felt so nice is, "See, you can do it. You made it!"

AGUILAR: As you get ready for your next big chapter, what advice do you have for other students at your high school?

MARTINEZ: My advice is to just do it. I would encourage my classmates to pursue higher education because it would help create a path lined with opportunities.

AGUILAR: Any shoutouts you'd like to give?

I want to give a shout out to my mom because she has been supporting me a lot since the beginning. I'd also like to give a shoutout to my siblings!



Dear Little Paola,

You are going to grow into a bold and confident woman. Chase your dreams fearlessly.

MEET SKYLER AYALA

Cajon High School, Dedeaux
Youth IMPACT Scholar

Meet Dedeaux Youth IMPACT Scholar, Skyler Ayala. Skyler aspires to make an impact by pursuing a career in cyber security. In our conversation, Skyler shares more about why he is pursuing an untraditional career path and how he hopes to inspire others along the way to be different and dream big.

AGUILAR: Can you share about the moment you found out that you were selected as one of the Dedeaux Youth IMPACT Scholars for your high school?

AYALA: My counselor Ms. Johnson called me out of class and I was so confused at first - I was thinking, *'Did I do something wrong?'*.

Then when I was in her office, she told me that I was chosen as one of the Dedeaux Youth IMPACT scholars! I got really excited because it's going to help me a lot with going to school.

My family is happy about this opportunity for me because they never really had a chance like this before. I'd be the first in my family to finish college, so they always push



me to keep going.

AGUILAR: In your scholarship application, our team learned that you are interested in cyber security. What sparked this interest for you?

AYALA: I have been fascinated with computers and always thought that they were cool. With the pathway that we have here at Cajon High School for cyber security, it made me want to get into that field more.

I've been taking it for three years, and it helped me learn a lot more on the relevance and need for cyber security. Since then, the rest is history!

AGUILAR: As you wrap up high school, what are the final thoughts that are racing through your mind?

AYALA: I feel good about graduating. But I do need to start summer classes for my college program!

College is going to be about 10-15 minutes away from home, so I'm not really too worried.

AGUILAR: Why is pursuing higher education important to you?

AYALA: It's important because I've seen the way I've seen my mom and other family members work today. My family is depending on me to pursue higher education because this is an opportunity they didn't have, and they want me to have a better career.

And my little brother is always asking me about school. It seems like he wants to do cyber security as well!

AGUILAR: Outside of your family encouraging you, what ignites you



Counselor Cynthia Johnson (pictured left) mentored Skyler to apply for the Dedeaux Youth IMPACT Scholarship.

to reach higher, dream bigger, and make an impact?

AYALA: I want bigger things for myself as well. So in my head I'm like, 'If I want to get a two-story house and have three cars, I gotta keep pushing!' Higher education is what will allow me to get there.

AGUILAR: What was that one defining moment that led to your realization that you are passionate about cyber security and it's a field you want to go in?

AYALA: That moment was during a presentation I attended at Cal State. Cal State had a presentation about cyber security and how important it is. There's over 20,000 jobs in California specifically for cyber security, and it keeps growing every year. Cyber security is a necessity in modern society because everything is becoming more developed and modernized.

AGUILAR: How are you aspiring to make an impact through cyber

security?

AYALA: I want to start off by working at a bank and protect people's personal information and accounts.

Eventually I'd want to work with the government and help protect so much more. Right now I don't know which part of the government I'd want to work for. I want to see and learn what's out there and then go from there.

AGUILAR: As you get ready for your next big chapter, what advice do you have for other students on pursuing higher education?

AYALA: Just go for it! In the end, you have to be there for yourself and work hard. Show yourself that you really want this, and pursuing college will help you launch towards your bigger dreams. It's important to dream bigger because it will always help you push yourself towards what you (and this world) needs.

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