

John 23 Educational Center Story of Hope

Submitted by Geraldine Bodi Middle School Supervisor and Outreach Coordinator

I am blessed to work at a non-profit mission, John XXIII Educational Center, that brings homework assistance and social emotional learning support to students of color in a low income community. It was a challenge last March to create something out of nothing and switch to virtual lessons, virtual tutoring, and in person social distance tutoring. Our numbers dropped until very recently. We picked up the ball immediately and pressed forward knowing to help even one student was important.

Soon after opening our evening homework assistance to 5th grade “L” began coming every day, usually for two sessions. She is a black public school student and needed little support with a small amount of homework. “L” was quiet at first and showed every sign of being a very responsible student. Over time both I and the middle school supervisor were able to get to know her better over art projects and academic games. During our conversations I first learned her RUSD virtual teacher’s method for warning an unruly student during class, “I will mute you, if you continue to interrupt the lesson.” “L” attends the former school I worked at and so we enjoyed the chuckle together.

On another occasion, I invited her to take part in our level two attendance incentive. If she brought a friend to register, both she and her friend would receive a \$5 restaurant gift card. Sadly, she said that she had no friends. I remembered it was her first year at Mitchell and most friends are ones we meet at school.

Not more than two weeks later, after opportunities for her to get to know another young lady who attends weekly, something changed. I heard her laugh and saw her eyes smile (masks don’t cover the emotion in our eyes!). During a gym activity, she came up to me and said joyfully, “Sarai and I are friends now!” This is not her only friend here. She and Gabriel talk quite a bit after homework time.

All people need social connection and the pandemic is unforgiving. Children are more teachable when their needs are met according to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs: Food, shelter, safety, love, and a sense of community. The student who has opportunities to mature socially is a better job candidate when they are adults. Engaging with others positively is a job skill.