

# YOTO Comes Through for Seniors



This article was written by student journalists and published in "El Guerrero", the student news magazine for Pueblo High School.

By Iram Arce

On May 24, a dozen Pueblo High School seniors will be graduating due in part to YOTO (Youth on Their Own) being there when these students most needed a helping hand.

YOTO is a dropout prevention program that supports the high school graduation and continued success of homeless, unaccompanied youth in Pima County.

YOTO was founded in 1986 when Ann Young, a guidance counselor in the Amphitheater School District, noticed that talented and motivated students were dropping out of school due to homelessness and being forced to live on their own without a parent or guardian. Inspired by the students' tenacity and willingness to stay in school, other school counselors, teachers, volunteers, and community members came together to form YOTO with the goal of helping students graduate.

Over the years, YOTO has helped thousands of high school students with a variety of services. Among the graduates at Pueblo this spring, Marco Madrigal, Carlos Chavez and Yesenia Pesqueira are especially grateful.

YOTO has been helping Marco Madrigal just this year, but he is grateful for all of the

services he received.

"I've had a very rough year," Madrigal admitted. "YOTO helped me with all kinds of expenses, and I couldn't have stayed in school without their help. I especially want to thank Mr. Matt Schmidgall [from YOTO] for all of his help. I lived up to my bargain to retain YOTO this year—including earning at least a 'C' in all of my classes."

Madrigal explained that YOTO has helped pay for his senior pictures, prom tickets, cap and gown and pays for school supplies and a hygiene kit. Also, Madrigal receives a check for \$140/month.

"I was really struggling before YOTO stepped in," Madrigal said. "I'll always be grateful for their assistance and real concern for me."

Madrigal said that he plans to pursue a career in environmental sciences or perhaps become a botanist.

Another student who has benefited greatly from YOTO in the past year and a half is senior Carlos Chavez.

Chavez lives with his cousin and receives help from YOTO including a check for \$140/month as well as school supplies, clothing and other necessities.

"I'm very thankful for YOTO's help," Chavez said. "I don't even know where to begin to thank them. They literally saved my life. Because of YOTO's generosity and support, I can now graduate from Pueblo High School and begin my education and eventually become a University of Arizona law school student."

Yesenia Pesqueira, another senior who has received YOTO's help, will be graduating from high school and beginning her collegiate future at Pima Community College and study nursing.

"I have to thank Mr. Matt Schmidgall for all of his help—he has been nothing except amazing," Pesqueira said. "He takes the time and has listened to me. He helped me when there was literally nobody else to turn to."

One of Pueblo's social workers, Ms. Ginger Arzani, is a liaison for YOTO, and she said there are more YOTO students than ever before.

"Some of these students' stories are truly heartbreaking," Arzani said.