



YOUTH ON THEIR OWN[®]



My name is Luna, and I'm a 2021 Cholla High School graduate and proud alumna of Youth On Their Own. First of all, I want to say thank you. You probably haven't met me, but if you support YOTO, you've had a big impact on me and so many other young people. Thank you!

When I was in high school, my mom kicked me out of the house a lot. One day, she kicked me out for good, and I found myself on my own. I was very lucky that my boyfriend's mom was able to take me in. Even with her support, however, I didn't think I'd be able to graduate from high school. I had a place to stay, but **I still had to take care of all my basic needs. I didn't think I'd have time to go to school.**

All that changed when I enrolled in YOTO. I spoke with my liaison - the person at my school who helps youth enroll in the YOTO Program. He told me that I could get **free food, hygiene products, school supplies, and more at YOTO's "Mini Mall"**. This was a huge relief for me! I also found out that YOTO would basically pay me to go to school! I just had to show them that I had good attendance, and I could earn an academic stipend each month. Because I could help my boyfriend's mom with food from the Mini Mall and a little money for rent, I felt like I was contributing to the household.

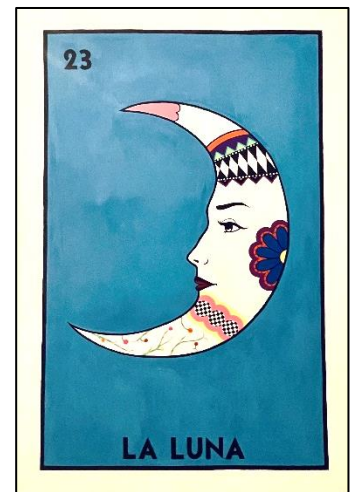
Each year, about **1,500 young people** like me enroll in YOTO's program. The Mini Mall is very important for us. With costs rising, especially the price of groceries and other basic items, it's really helpful to know that we can depend on YOTO for these things. In fact, even more youth are accessing the Mini Mall now than when I was in high school. During the 2022-23 school year alone, **YOTO provided around 170,000 basic needs items to youth.** Without the support of community members like you who donate to YOTO, this wouldn't be possible.

Now, it's time to **replenish our stock!** From July until September 30th, YOTO is holding the annual **Back to School Challenge**. We are collecting nonperishable food, full-sized toiletries, and school supplies in preparation for the upcoming school year. If you're interested in holding a drive or donating goods, we have a **list of items that are most needed** on our website, **www.yoto.org/backtoschool**. Remember, with so many students enrolling in our program, every little bit helps!

Also, this year there is a special opportunity for folks who **make a financial donation** towards the Back to School Challenge. **The Lester & Roberta Smith Foundation has agreed to match all financial gifts up to \$20,000.** This is great news because it means that your donation can go twice as far! I'm always so amazed by the generosity of YOTO's supporters!

While my boyfriend's mom is very supportive, graduating from high school was still a challenge. Throughout all of it, however, my YOTO Family helped motivate me. Whenever I got a stipend check or a package from the Mini Mall, YOTO would include **notes of encouragement** written by folks in the community. These were incredibly impactful for me. In fact, I've kept a few of them with me. My favorite is one that reads, **"If you've been broken, but you've still had the courage to be gentle with others, you deserve a love deeper than the ocean."** It's inspiring to know that there are people out there who, even though they don't know me, want to see me succeed.

Now that I've graduated from high school, I'm working as a YOTO Ambassador. When folks have an event benefiting YOTO, sometimes I go and share my story with them. **I like being able to personally tell people how much they're doing for youth when they support YOTO.** In addition to being a YOTO Ambassador, I'm also an artist. I love turning the ideas in my head into something beautiful and real. In fact, in YOTO's new building, one of my pieces (see right) is going to be part of the Alumni Wall! I'm very excited that my art - something I created and is now real - will be part of YOTO's "forever home" - something the YOTO Family created, which is now also real. **When YOTO moves to its new space this fall, I hope you have the chance to come see the building - and my painting- in person!**



I like art because I like to make beautiful things. **I think that if you pay attention, you can find beauty in lots of unusual places, even in the things that challenge you most.** I think a lot about my mom. She had a difficult upbringing, and I wonder if she would have graduated high school if she had enrolled in YOTO. As for me, I did graduate. I'm proud of myself for overcoming so many obstacles and finding beauty wherever I could. Thank you for supporting me and so many young people like me as we look for the beauty and the good, not just in our community, but in ourselves. **You truly do make a difference** in the lives of so many young people. Thank you!

Sincerely,

Luna

Luna Aguirre
Youth On Their Own Alumna & Ambassador

Remember, financial contributions to YOTO qualify for the AZ Charitable Tax Credit! That means that if you pay Arizona state taxes, you can receive a dollar-for-dollar credit of up to \$400 per person (\$800 per couple filing jointly). Find more info about the tax credit at YOTO's website: www.yoto.org.

Have questions? Give us a call at (520) 293-1136 or visit our website: www.yoto.org
YOTO's Federal Tax ID: 86-0644388 | YOTO's QCO Code for the AZ Charitable Tax Credit: 20365