



Dear YOTO Family,

My name is **Elizabeth Camarillo Gutierrez**, and in addition to being a college graduate, a tech industry professional, and a published author, I am also **a proud graduate of the Youth On Their Own (YOTO) program**. In this season of joy, reflection, and gratitude, I want to share a little bit of my story with you and explain why **your support is crucial to empowering youth experiencing homelessness!** When I was growing up, circumstances beyond my control separated me from my family: they were in Mexico and I was on my own in the United States. I persevered and graduated as valedictorian of my high school, but my journey was not an easy one. The support I received from YOTO played a significant role in my success.



When I joined YOTO, I was struggling to make ends meet. I didn't know where my next meal would come from or how I would pay for basic necessities like toiletries and clothing. After enrolling in the YOTO program, however, I was able to earn a **monthly stipend** which helped me cover these expenses and focus on my education. I could visit the **Mini Mall** to get free basic needs supplies like food and hygiene products. Also, YOTO staff offered **support and guidance**, which gave me peace of mind and allowed me to worry less about *surviving* and more about *thriving*.

With the help of caring individuals at YOTO and in my school, **I was able to feel normal again**. I was able to focus on my studies, participate in extracurricular activities, and even pursue my passion for writing. After graduating, I went on to attend – and graduate from – the University of Pennsylvania. Recently, **I also wrote an award-winning book** called "My Side of the River" that goes into greater depth about my experience growing up and which has been featured in The New York Times, Vogue Mexico, and People Magazine! While I am incredibly proud of all these accomplishments, I know that I wouldn't be where I am today without the support of my YOTO Family. You provided me with the resources and guidance I needed to succeed, even when it seemed impossible. That's why I'm so passionate about giving back and supporting other young people who are facing similar challenges.

This holiday season, I'm asking you to support the organization that has had such a positive impact on my life and the lives of thousands of other young people in our community. Last year alone, YOTO youth earned over \$2 million in academic stipends for attending school. And this paid off! In 2024, the graduation rate for YOTO seniors was 93%! That's the highest it's ever been! While this is an incredible accomplishment, I know it can only happen with the commitment and contributions of the many generous individuals and organizations in the Tucson community who also want to see youth succeed. In fact, every year, there are more and more youth doing their best to shine. They, too, will attend school, earn a stipend, visit the Mini Mall, and benefit from the wonderful guidance provided by YOTO.



As a student in the YOTO program, I didn't realize how many supportive YOTO Family members were in my corner. I have since learned about generous supporters like Larry "Buzz" Petersen and Roberta "Robbie" Willingham who, for the fifth year in a row, have offered to match gifts made toward the Spread the Warmth Challenge up to \$50,000! That means that **if you make your gift towards the Spread the Warmth Challenge, Buzz & Robbie will match it dollar-for dollar up to \$50,000!**

I hope you will consider helping YOTO take advantage of this generous offer by making a year-end gift today. Your generosity will make a very real difference in the lives of students with similar circumstances to me, and I am grateful for your support. Thank you for taking the time to learn a little about my story. I wish you a happy and peaceful holiday season!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Elizabeth'.

Elizabeth Camarillo Gutierrez

***P.S. Your year-end donation to YOTO is tax deductible and qualifies for the Arizona Charitable Tax Credit! Please make your gift today and have it doubled by Buzz & Robbie's match! Thank you.***

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