



Dear YOTO Family,

If I haven't had the pleasure of meeting you, please let me introduce myself. My name is **Ann Young**. Nearly forty years ago, I founded the organization Youth On Their Own, or YOTO. Recently, I have been reflecting upon the many ways that YOTO has evolved, as well as the incredibly generous and committed individuals who have stuck by YOTO through thick and thin. I hope you'll take a few minutes to allow me to both share my gratitude for your support and ask you to continue advocating for youth in our community.

### ***YOTO's Past***

Forty years ago, I was a high school counselor deeply concerned about the many smart, promising students struggling to stay in school because they had to work, cope with food insecurity, or find a safe place to sleep. These youth were on their own through no fault of their own, sometimes due to mental or physical health crises, neglect or abuse, or even immigration challenges that separated them from their families while they stayed in Tucson to pursue that all-important educational milestone: **a high school diploma**.



*The founder of Youth On Their Own,  
Ann Young*



*An early photo of Ann Young with  
YOTO youth in the background*

After I made my church at the time, St. Andrew's Presbyterian, aware of these students' stories, they invited me to speak to the congregation. That morning proved to be a barometer of our community's solidarity, raising over \$80,000 in a matter of hours. Soon volunteers and donors stepped forward. Through their unexpected contributions and kindness, we established a vital program supporting youth experiencing homelessness and, in 1988, launched YOTO's **Academic Stipend**.

## YOTO's Present

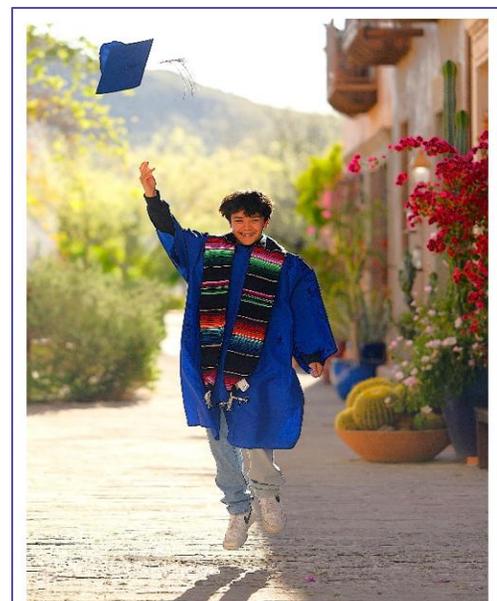


YOTO has amplified its impact, now serving about **1,500 young people** each year! The Academic Stipend — through which youth are able to earn a financial incentive for attending school — has skyrocketed, with over **\$1.5 million** in direct support provided to youth each year. Perhaps most visibly, YOTO has moved to a **new campus**, relocating to Country Club Road in 2023. The **Mini Mall**, which was born in my small office at Amphi High School, now distributes nearly **200,000 basic needs items to youth, 63% of which are donated by our amazing community members.**

More than anything, however, **it's your belief in the potential of YOTO youth that makes all the difference.** By showing youth that they matter, you inspire them to believe not only in themselves, but in the community around them. Last school year, YOTO seniors achieved an impressive **89% graduation rate!** Considering Arizona's statewide graduation rate for homeless youth is only 43%, YOTO is working wonders! This success is only possible through the united support of our YOTO Family. As one YOTO graduate shared:

*"Knowing I have people in my corner fighting for me to cross the finish line has meant the world to me. I would like to do the same as YOTO and help others as they helped me during the toughest time of my life."*

While I'm incredibly proud of the organization YOTO has become, **there are still many, many youth who need support.** Recent and upcoming cuts to federal programs that provide much-needed nutritional, medical, and housing assistance not only impact YOTO youth directly, they impact the families who provide youth a place to stay. Dedicated funding that since 1987 has guaranteed educational access to the **estimated 1.4 million youth in the United States experiencing homelessness** is in danger of being eliminated. Public schools are having to make difficult choices about which programs they can continue to fund, how many teachers they can keep on staff, and how they will afford to help youth experiencing homelessness stay in school. If we truly believe in the power and potential of youth, our community must support them now!



YOTO alumnus Vida celebrating his high school graduation

## YOTO's Future

Regardless of our differences, as members of the YOTO Family, there is one thing we can all agree upon: **youth matter**. That is why as YOTO launches the **2025 Spread the Warmth Challenge**, I ask you to join me in honoring not just what we've already accomplished, but what still lies ahead. By contributing to this year's challenge, **YOU make it possible** for youth experiencing homelessness to get the financial, material, and motivational support they need to build a future filled with hope, opportunity, and possibility.

As in past years, when you make a financial contribution to the Spread the Warmth Challenge, your gift goes twice as far! Over the years, I've been lucky to meet exceptionally generous people who support YOTO youth. **Thanks to two of these dedicated individuals, Larry "Buzz" Petersen and Roberta "Robbie" Willingham, gifts to this year's Spread the Warmth Challenge will be matched up to \$50,000.** Please help YOTO take advantage of Buzz and Robbie's immense generosity by making your gift today!

As I look back on the long and winding road of YOTO's past, I would like to thank everyone who had a hand in making Youth On Their Own the impactful, compassionate, and inspiring organization it is today. I am filled with hope for what the next forty years will bring! Because with supporters like you, I know that YOTO youth — and our entire community — have a bright future ahead. **Thank you for being part of this extraordinary journey!**



With heartfelt gratitude,

Ann Young  
Founder, Youth On Their Own



*P.S. YOTO's next **Spring Lunch** is scheduled for **March 6<sup>th</sup>**! The event will be a **special celebration** of the first Forty Years of YOTO. If you're interested in joining us, the link for purchasing tickets is active on YOTO's website, [yoto.org](http://yoto.org). We anticipate selling out, so please reserve your space early to join us as we look forward to **another fabulous Forty Years of YOTO!***

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