

Testimonials from Our Students



From left to right: Federico Xol, Carmen O'Brien, Ana Torres and her daughter Allison, and Ricardo Olea.

Ricardo Olea

My name is Ricardo Olea, and I am from Colima, Mexico. I came to Virginia about two years ago. Before coming to this country I had been studying and working full-time in Mexico, and I was in my first semester of industrial engineering, doing well. But during my second semester the cost of my studies increased a lot and I was not able to afford it. My family is of low means and I also have 8 younger brothers. For this reason I decided to come to this country, leaving behind my family and friends, and I came looking for a better life. But when I arrived here I was in an unfamiliar place, and even though I lived with my aunt, I did not know her because the last time I saw her I was 9 years old. The change for me was very difficult and when I began working it was so complicated for me because I did not know the language. But all of this motivated me to work hard and to seek a better life for me and my family. Thanks to the programs here at the Sacred Heart Center, and to the people that work here every day teaching us, I am almost finished with my GED and I just have one section left to pass and I will receive the diploma. Now I am taking an English class. The Center is very good. They give us the tools that we need to support our learning. I feel that I need English to be able to live here for the things I need to do every day and for my work. My dream is to learn English well and to go to the University to continue my studies and to finish. I only have left to say thank you and that *I am so happy that there are places like this one*. Thank you for listening.

Federico Xol

My name is Federico Xol and I am from Guatemala. I came here 7 years ago. I came to this country because I wanted to learn more about the world. I also had a dream of studying. I came here and heard about the GED test. I did not know what to do, but by coming here to the Sacred Heart Center, I found out about the program.

I did the GED preparation program in Spanish and got my GED diploma, even though there were many obstacles. It took me about a year to get the diploma, but I did it.

I also went through the Latino Leadership Program with Father Jack and just graduated last month. Because of these programs, I have been able to expand my vision of this community. I have gone to events that I would not have known about. The events made me feel included in this community. I had the choice of keeping to myself and being alone, but through the Center, I was able to be a part of this community. Now I am able to talk to people different from me and get to know them.

The next steps for me are to continue my studies and to get my contractor's license to start my own business. *I feel that if I don't do it for myself, who will do it for me?* I will keep advancing and moving forward.

Carmen O'Brien

Good morning brothers and sisters, I am Carmen Milagros Chumpitazi O'Brian. I was born in Peru and a month ago I took the oath to become a U.S. Citizen. After having lived 15 years of a Missionary life in various parts of the world, I arrived in the United States in February, 2007, and I found a family here at the Sacred Heart Parrish and at the Sacred Heart Center. I really love the Sacred Heart Center because it has helped me to advance in both my personal and educational goals. I feel that I have been able to fully realize my talents and I have received knowledge that has strengthened me.

I first participated in the Hispanic Citizen's Academy that was held here through the Richmond Police Department. Through that program I learned how to be a better citizen, and I will never forget those evenings of classes that gave me a sense of peace to know that I am living here in this country. I was also blessed to connect with the Lay Health Promoters program that was held here through CrossOver Ministry, and I became a Lay Health Promoter. Through the Center's core educational programs, I took English as a Second Language classes and GED classes with wonderful teachers, both volunteers and professional instructors that are very serious about helping their students succeed. Last but not least, I took the Center's citizenship classes with a great teacher. I learned a lot more than the 100 questions that are on the test. I also learned the history of this beautiful country that offers us many opportunities. I then passed my exam, I took my oath to serve this country and its beautiful people, *I have registered to vote in this upcoming election, and here I am!!*

After meeting my husband, James O'Brien and getting married in 2012, many more opportunities arrived. I worked for the Center through the Family Literacy program – it was my first job. For the last two years I have worked for the Sacred Heart Parrish, coordinating the Religious Education and Music programs – thank you, Father Shay.

I have many big dreams and many challenges, but I feel that having these programs available in our community benefits many people and allows them to thrive and succeed to reach their dreams – as I have mine. I believe that the Sacred Heart Center helps many people's dreams come true, thanks to your support and dedication. I feel that the people that work here are a family, my family, and many people like me are experiencing this connection.

I know that God trusts me, and for that reason He puts what I need to reach towards in my path, and the Sacred Heart Center has helped me to walk that path and to achieve it.

Thank you.

Ana Torres

My name is Ana Torres, and I am from Guadalajara, Mexico. I came to the USA in 2004. When I came to Richmond, I found out about the church through family members. I began attending church here at Sacred Heart. When I came to the USA, I thought I could speak English. Then I connected with the Sacred Heart Center programs. In January 2016 I began taking ESL Classes. My daughter Allison began the Pasitos Exitosos program at the same time. She would come with me to classes twice a week, and I would have my class and she would have her class. When I started classes here, I learned about verbs and grammar. The classes have helped me a lot to go to the store, to the doctor, and to communicate with my child's school.

Allison's experience was even bigger. Before coming to the Center, she had not had much contact with other children, and she did not know her letters or colors. Once she started coming here, she made friends and would count the days until she would come to the Center. And she still loves her Sacred Heart Center teachers very much. She learned how to act in the classroom, and she discovered things, like how to plant seeds. She is now in Head Start in Chesterfield and she is doing great! I think Pasitos Exitosos here at the Center helped her make the transition into preschool. Because of the Center she is more independent and ready for school.

Now I have begun to also take the GED classes, so I take English in the morning and GED in the afternoons. I started with the hardest class – math. I felt that because I have not been able to go to school for 17 years I needed to challenge myself. I am late but I am doing it. My dream is to learn English well, and I want to finish my GED to be able to go into a dental assistant program. *Even if I am 50 years old when I get there, I will do it!* The Sacred Heart Center is helping me to get there. By doing this, I am also an example for my child. So that she can see what I did and that she has to do even more. Thank you.