

After School Program Success Story

Caesar is a 37-year-old father who works full-time at the County of San Diego. When he moved to Wakeland's Atmosphere community in downtown San Diego a few years ago, his son Joseph was just entering kindergarten and needed assistance learning English. The family's home language is Chaldean, and little Joseph began to attend the onsite After School Program to get help acquiring his new language and completing his schoolwork. He thrived until early 2020, when COVID-19 stay-at-home orders shut down both the After School Program and in-person schooling. By that time, Caesar was pursuing his bachelor's degree in Political Science at UCSD in addition to working full time at the County and couldn't help Joseph with his classes as much as the boy needed.

"It was very challenging," said Caesar. "Joseph really needs someone there to take his hand and guide him through his schoolwork, but my wife doesn't know much English, I was gone all day at work and when I came home at night, I had my own university classes to attend."

The third grader became increasingly frustrated and began to fall behind. By February 2021, Joseph had 28 missing assignments and felt that he would never catch up. That was when Caesar heard that the After School Program would be re-opening in a safe and socially distanced format.

He began sending his son in two times a week, where Joseph worked with Site Coordinator Maria Garcia to gradually chip away at his overwhelming load. Although at first the boy didn't think he could complete the work, Maria told him it was possible and started him out with the easier tasks to build his confidence.

"After Joseph started back at the After School Program, I saw him become more comfortable with homework and schoolwork," said Caesar. "Maria made the learning environment more enjoyable for him."

Within a few months, Joseph had completed all his backlogged assignments.

"I'm very happy and I'm so proud of Joseph," said Maria. "He's worked so hard. For an eight-year-old to sit down and catch up on so many assignments is really an accomplishment."

Joseph went back to school in person in the late spring. Now, Maria is working to stay in touch with his teacher to focus on how she can continue to help him at home. Caesar, meanwhile, is grateful for the benefits his son has gained from After School Program.

"Without the After School Program, this would have been a big problem for my family," said Caesar. "I want to thank Maria. She is more than a teacher to my son. She is like a mom to the kids in the After School Program."

