



Student Success Story

Andrew Gallegos
Madera Adult School

Andrew Gallegos is, in his words, "A proud graduate of Madera Adult School," and was selected as the Student of the Year by the Madera Adult School Staff. Andrew's education was interrupted when he was about eight years old. At that time he was living with his grandparents who were also raising eighteen other grandchildren. His grandparents cared for him deeply but were unable to provide the level of supervision he needed at that age. Andrew's first interaction with the Justice System came when he was only nine years old landing him in Juvenile Hall. He entered a group home at twelve, the California Youth Authority at thirteen, jail at eighteen, and prison from twenty-one to thirty-one.

Andrew realized he wanted more out of life and states that eventually he learned he had to be truthful with himself in order to change. While incarcerated in the Madera County Jail, a man named Joe Rosso from Valley West Church in Madera spoke with him. Andrew says, "He helped me get the support I needed when I got out." This new support system, "helped me get out of the life of misery, which is why I now spend my time giving back." Andrew now spends his time volunteering with his church, The Universal Church in Fresno, as a youth leader organizing activities and events. Andrew also travels to Avenal State Prison every Tuesday to meet with inmates to offer the same compassion and direction that was given to him. "The ultimate goal is to help them once they are out, not just help them while they are there. That is one way that I give back to my community. I also sponsor people to attend the Men of Integrity Conference at Sugar Pine Christian Camp each year. I do these things because I believe that people can change and sometimes they just don't have the support to do it on their own. Because someone believed in me, I was able to change my life. And, I believe God gave me a second chance to do good things with my family and be a positive example for my kids and others."

Today, Andrew owns his own business, has been married to his wife Lydia for twenty years, and is raising four children. Graduating at the same ceremony as his son, Andrew gave the commencement speech. During his speech Andrew spoke to the audience stating, "Through all of this, I've learned that it's very important to have a positive attitude. Your attitude is everything in life. If you don't have a positive attitude it will cause problems for you and everybody around you, and eventually it will take over your character and personality making you become something you're not meant to be. We can't change our past, but we can make great decisions about our future. This is what I've done and this is what I'll continue to do in order to be successful. My message to the youth today is that I know life gets hard. But I want you to know that no matter what, just keep putting one foot in front of the other. This isn't a race so you don't have to be where the other person is. We all have our place in life. Just keep moving forward, persevering, and know everything will be fine. Never give up, and always be kind." When asked why it was important for him to return to school to earn his diploma Andrew said, "It is something that my mom always wanted, that any mother would want". Madera Adult School is proud to have been a part of Andrew's educational and life journey.



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