

## Greater New Britain Teen Pregnancy Prevention, Inc.

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## News From Pathways/Senderos

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### A Life Changing Job, A Life Changing Journey

By Nick Jakubowski



Twenty years ago, when I was 21, I started working in the youth development field. As far back as I can remember, I always wanted to work with kids, helping to inspire, guide, and educate them. Maybe it was because my dad was an educator and teaching just oozed off of all he did. Or maybe it was because my mother was a social worker, and helping people, oftentimes while the individuals were in crisis, was second nature to her. I always wanted to be like them, but to somehow combine both of their professions into one. Where could I find such an opportunity to be both teacher and social worker?

In 2005, a few years into my youth development career, I found that answer in the most unique, inspiring, and amazing program: The Pathways/Senderos Center.

I did not know much about Pathways, just that it was located on Arch Street and my parents donated to the program. Truth be told, I was reluctant to even apply for the job

of High School Coordinator. I was “comfortable” where I was at that point in my life, content with working with kids in the afternoon and coaching baseball at night. It took some motivation from one of my best friends (Molly, who later became a Pathways board member) and my girlfriend at the time (Connie, who later became my wife) to convince me to write a resume and go to the interview. Wisely, I listened to them.

I was interviewed by the program’s founder and former director, Roseanne Bilodeau. The interview lasted almost 3 hours, not normal for any interview, but as I learned very quickly, this was NOT a normal place. I was instantly drawn into the program design, the unique structure of following students for a 7-year period during some of the toughest,



weirdest times of their young lives. The “family” feel was intense right from the interview. Roseanne was not hiring JUST a staff member; she was adding someone to the Pathways family. That carried much more weight than simply clocking in and out and collecting a paycheck. In hindsight, that is probably why the interview took so long. She wanted to make sure that who she was bringing into the lives of these amazing students was a good fit, not just professionally, but also, and probably more importantly, personally. A few weeks later she offered me the position, and in that moment my life changed for the better, forever.

I spent the last 17 years at Pathways, working my way up from a coordinator into an Executive role. Like so many of the students we have worked with over the years, I am the person I am today because of my time spent at Pathways. While some days have been more trying than others (which happens when you work in a non-profit) as I reflect on my time spent here, I can confidently say that I have LOVED every day working with our students and alongside our wonderful staff. When you feel the way I have about work, then it is not really work, it is just who you are and what you do. There was never any dread driving to the center each morning, just thoughts about how I can help change someone’s world for the better on any given day, in any given moment. Everyone should be as fortunate as I have been to enjoy a job as much and as deeply as I have. That is a message I have always said to our kids: “find something you love to do so it never feels



like work.” I have spent the last 17 years loving my job, loving my students, and loving Pathways. That feels good!!

Twenty years after the start of my youth development career, Pathways staff and students threw me a “farewell” party. I have been extremely humbled and touched by the outpouring of love, support, and well wishes from so many people whose lives I have had the privilege to be a part of. I have met some of the most



amazing people during my journey, not just kids. We have a Board of Directors that is committed to the betterment of all our students, and that support is vital to our success. I have worked alongside some of the most generous and faithful volunteers. People like Kathleen, Sue, Jackie, and Marsha (to name a few) have been important to our students for all these years, but also to me and the staff. We could not do all that we have without their support, and the support of the community at large.



I have also been blessed to work alongside some of the best and brightest people I have ever met. The staff knows how I feel about them, professionally and personally, and they are etched in my heart forever for being by my side during this whole journey. How lucky am I to have worked side by side with my best friend, Geoff, and my “sister” Heather for all these years? Those opportunities do not happen often to many people.

And then there are the kids, my whole reason for everything, my motivation for trying to change the world. I am a New Britain kid, so it was always easy for me to connect and see myself inside our students. I am, and will always be, impressed, motivated, and proud of ALL of the kids that pass through the program because they are making their lives, and the lives of the people around them, better and more fruitful. They are amazing, always have been, always will be, and I love them all as individuals very much.

I could stay and continue to be “comfortable,” doing work that I love. But for 17 years, I have preached to students to put themselves out there, take risks, go into the unknown with bright eyes and an open mind and embrace change in all its glorious, and sometimes scary, forms. It is now time for me to follow this advice.

When I was 17 years old, I graduated from New Britain High School, and after 17 years at Pathways, it is now time for me to graduate again, and move on to the next challenge and opportunity life has for me. Words will never do justice to how I feel about Pathways and the wonderful people who make it the incredible place it is. All I can say to everyone is what my proud mother wrote to me on my first day of work at Pathways in 2005: “Be the change you wish to see in this world.”

Peace!!



## A Letter from the Director

Spring is a time for growth and change. The cold, dark days of winter are behind us and the promise of brighter days lay ahead. Although change is hard, sometimes it is needed to grow and flourish. Through my 20+ years at Pathways/Senderos there have been many changes; change of staff, change of location, change of leadership. However, nothing quite prepared me for the most recent, unexpected change.

As you know, my partner, Nick Jakubowski, left his position as Co-Executive Director. Nick and I worked together for 17 years. We went through a lot together, personally and professionally. Together, we grew the program to what it is today. We endured all the challenges that come with running a non-profit, not to mention navigating the past two years of the pandemic. At Nick's farewell party, I



was reminded of the power of the program, the impact on the youth we serve. 17 years' worth of Pathways graduates attended the party to thank Nick and wish him well on his new journey. Although there were plenty of tears, the Center was full of smiles and laughter. Seeing all these graduates together emphasized what the Center represents: safety, happiness, family, and community. It showed just how much of an impact Pathways has had on all who have walked through the doors over the years. Our methodology encourages our youth to feel nurtured and cared for, and to reciprocate that to others. It is clear that our participants have received that message.

Although this is a huge change, Pathways' mission and our dedication to our boys and girls remains the same. I am truly committed to our youth and focused on helping them create the best future for themselves. I am looking forward to the future of Pathways/Senderos and I am thankful to all of you who reached out to me to show your support. It is the support of our community that keeps this small but important non-profit thriving. Thank you all!

Heather Mills

Executive Director



## From Student to Staff

By Nicole Villanueva

I came to Pathways in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade, thinking I was just in some normal afterschool program. Little did I know that I would spend every weekday of the next 7 years of my life here. I have grown to consider this place like a second home, and the staff and other students like my family.

Not only do the students receive help academically but also in their personal lives. Many people have put so much trust in the staff to be able to ask for guidance on topics they never felt comfortable asking



anybody else. I can truly say the Pathways/Senderos Center is a judgement free zone. Over the years I have seen many people from different backgrounds come here, and not once have I seen anyone left out. All are welcomed by everyone.

I never expected to become a staff member here, but ever since I started, I have been motivated to become an even better version of myself. I plan on being someone the students can trust. I want to offer guidance to those who join the program, much like the staff did for me when I was a student.

# Meet Our New Program Manager!

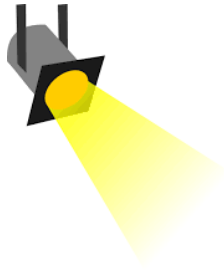
By Giovanni Calderon

Introductions are difficult. Writing introductions, I would argue, doubly so. So much is said about a person by who they present themselves as in the first foray into communication. How do they present themselves? How confident or shy are they in new environments? So as opposed to listing a long history of credentials, or discussing why I feel this program is a perfect fit for me and my hopes for being a perfect fit in turn, I want to tell you a bit about why Pathways/Senderos is important.



Our first steps into adulthood are tumultuous. Finding ourselves is a lifelong learning experience that is strengthened by accomplishments and new knowledge. Oftentimes when we look back on our formative years, we wish we had just one more lesson, or just one more bit of spare time, or even just one more model to mold ourselves after. In its humble nature, Pathways never promises these things, but delivers on them time and again. The staff here have their hearts and experience sewn into the DNA of this program, and that same conviction has guided Pathways through an economic crisis, a change of venue, and even a global pandemic. They are here, fighting to maintain the integrity and support that our students need to build upon those foundational childhood and early adulthood moments. I am so glad to have been offered the chance to work alongside them all, and in turn I promise to deliver all of my experience and passion into my work and companionship with the students entrusted to my care.

So allow me to introduce myself. My name is Giovanni Miguel Calderon. I am the new Program Manager here at Pathways/Senderos. And I can't wait to get started.



## Student Spotlight

This year, four of our students are graduating high school.

**Lismaniely Gonzalez** joined Pathways as a freshman. **Elisabeth Lopez, Brayan Ortiz, and Nathan Rodriguez** all joined in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade. Elisabeth had two older brothers who attended the program, as well as a younger brother still in the program. Brayan

has a younger brother still in the program as well, and his older cousin graduated from the program last year. Brayan and Elisabeth both plan to attend Tunxis in the fall. Nathan and Lismaniely are undecided about the fall, but they are looking forward to graduation, and we know that whatever they decide to do, it will be the right decision for themselves.

We also have three students who will be graduating from middle school and transitioning to high school. **Rodrigo Ortiz, Yani Zaid, and Akira Gunawan** joined Pathways the summer before their 6<sup>th</sup> grade. Rodrigo and Akira both have older brothers who attended the program. They will be attending New Britain High School in the fall.

These students have gone through a lot in the past 2 and a half years. Their lives and their school careers were upended by the pandemic. But they continued to work hard and despite all the obstacles, they have persevered. They make us proud every day.

## Thanks to All of Our Supporters!

We appreciate you all so much for everything you do for our program and our participants! We would not exist without the support of our community members. In the next few weeks, we will be sending out our Donor List, acknowledging all of our donors from the past year. Please be on the lookout! As always, if you have made a donation and do not see your name on the list, please don't hesitate to reach out to us so we can make the correction! Thanks again for your support!

If you are interested in donating, you can do so on our website, using PayPal or a credit/debit card. You can also donate by mail with cash, check, or you can use Venmo. Our Venmo username is @PathwaysNB. We appreciate anything you can do!



# Save the Date!

## 23rd Annual Pathways Walkathon

### Sunday, September 25, 2022

Registration begins at 9:30am; Raffle begins at 11:15am

***Walnut Hill Park, New Britain, CT***

Please consider becoming a sponsor; we will promote you and/or your business on our t-shirt, website and social media pages!

We hope to see you there!

For more information, call: 860-229-2776; Or email: [nbtpp@snet.net](mailto:nbtpp@snet.net)

