



Southbridge Sisters Gain Success from YouthWorks Program

By Colleen Neely

The Arc, Center of Hope Foundation, Inc.



Anyelyn Alvarado, a former YouthWorks Participant stands with her sister, Wilmarie Alvarado, a current YouthWorks Participant

Although Wilmarie Alvarado may look like a typical 16 year old High school student, she is anything but. At only 16 years old, Wilmarie has more work experience and professional references than most teenagers her age.

At 14 years old, she applied to become part of the YouthWorks Program which is a Massachusetts state funded program that runs for 6-7 weeks during the summer and helps find employment for youth aged 14-21. It is a program that teaches youth work readiness skills while also helping to keep at-risk teens actively busy during the summer.

The Center of Hope Foundation, Inc. in Southbridge Massachusetts has been involved in the YouthWorks Program for the last four years. In 2012, Wilmarie applied for the Youthworks program through the Center of Hope and was accepted into the program. She then ended up working for the next two summers at one of their adult day programs, Southbridge Day Habilitation, and this past summer she worked at their West Street Day Habilitation Program. Monique, the Program Administrator says, "Wilmarie is a wonderful employee. We were really

happy to have her placed at our program this summer. She is friendly, outgoing, and genuinely cares for the program members. They adored her. I hope she is placed in my program again next summer."

Wilmarie smiled when asked if she enjoyed her experience the last three summers as part of the YouthWorks Program. "I love it here! I hope they consider hiring me for their extended day program when a position becomes available."

When asked what Wilmarie's hopes are for the future, she says that she would like to be a Forensic Psychologist or a Mental Health Counselor. She hopes to get into a community college first and then transfer to a four year college.

What's even more amazing about this story is that Wilmarie's sister, Anyelyn, was part of the YouthWorks program at the Center of Hope back in 2010. Anyelyn is currently employed as a full-time direct care staff person at the Center of Hope in their Quinebaug River Day Habilitation Program. On top of working full-time, Anyelyn is also putting herself through college. She is currently enrolled at Quinsigamond Community College and has 10 more classes to complete before earning her Associates Degree.

Anyelyn says of the YouthWorks Program, "It has helped me in every single way." By getting work experience at the Center of Hope through the YouthWorks program, the Program Administrators were impressed with Anyelyn's work ethic and willingness to learn new things. What started as a summer job through YouthWorks back in 2010 (the program ran from the start of July to end of August), led to the Program Administrators asking Anyelyn back as a per diem staff person during her school vacations. She was then hired as a part-time staff person and worked the extended day program every afternoon Monday through Thursday. Once Anyelyn graduated high school, she had a full-time job lined up at the Center.

Anyelyn is a very ambitious young lady. "I set goals for myself. I wanted to purchase a new car. So back in May 2013 I bought a new car. This past May I purchased my own home. All of the down payment money was money I had earned myself. Both the car and the house are under my name. I didn't even need anyone to cosign with me." Anyelyn purchased a two family house in Southbridge, Massachusetts and her parents rent the second half of the house from her.

Anyelyn added that she has recently changed her major from Criminal Justice to Human Services. She is hoping to have a career in Social Work. As Anyelyn herself said, she sets goals for herself and as stated above, she is one very driven and mature young lady. She can most definitely accomplish anything she sets her mind to.

This is just one success story from the YouthWorks program that was run in Southbridge, Massachusetts. There are several more. To date, the Center of Hope, in four years of being involved in the program, has successfully hired four youths for full time direct care staff positions following their summer experiences. All four staff are reliable and highly valued employees.