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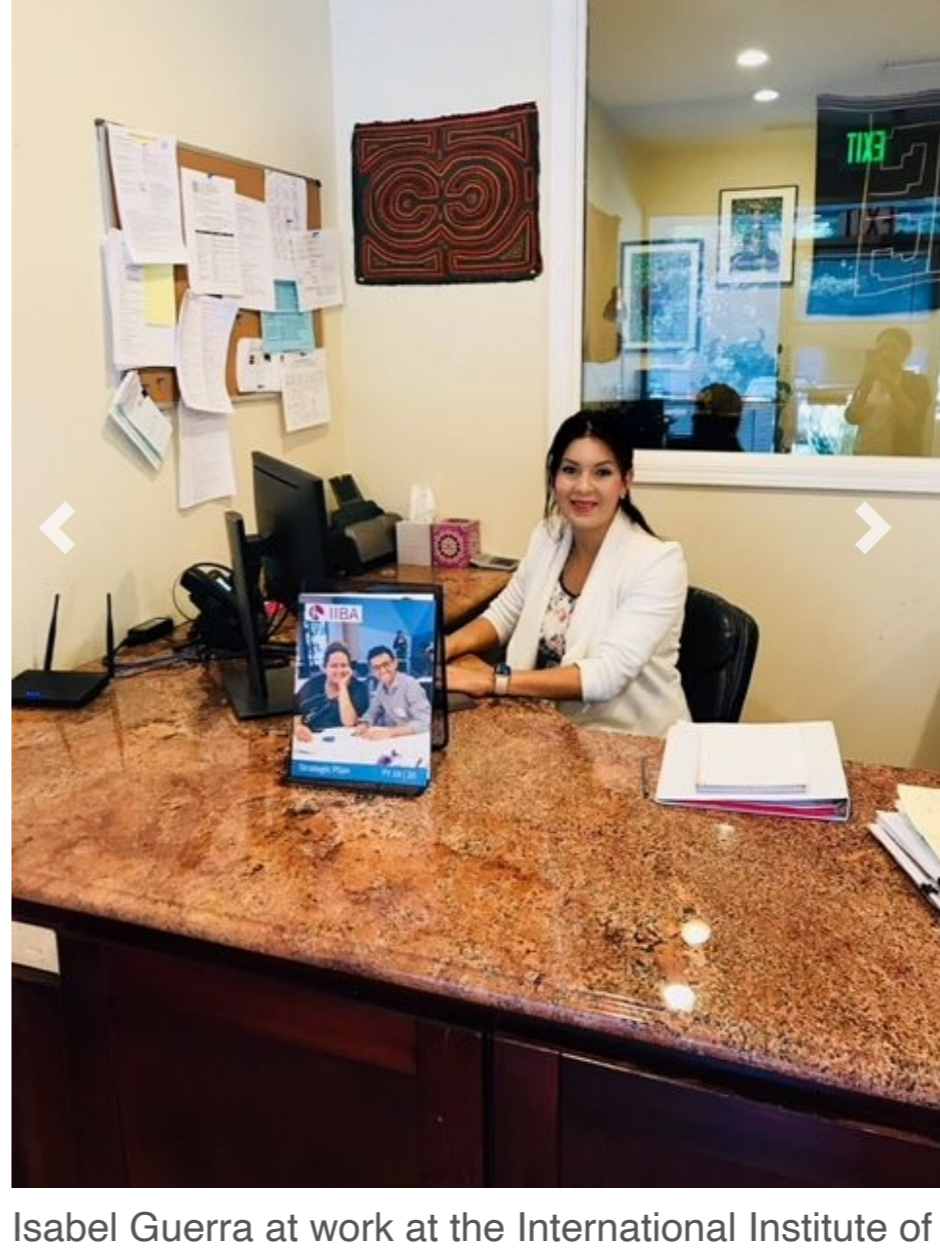
Holiday Fund: Upward Scholars offers 'life-changing' educational help

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By Linda Prieto, executive director of Upward Scholars

SLIDESHOW

Nine months ago, Upward Scholars student Isabel Guerra earned her living cleaning other people's houses. Now, she's an administrative assistant.



Isabel Guerra at work at the International Institute of the Bay Area. Photo courtesy of Upward Scholars.

Isabel's trajectory was made possible by Upward Scholars, a local nonprofit that provides financial and academic support to low-income adults, mostly immigrants, so they can continue their education in community college, get better jobs, and serve as role models and advocates for their children.

Isabel is a native of Guatemala, and after arriving in the U.S., Isabel, age 29, enrolled in ESL classes, first at Sequoia Adult School, where she took basic ESL classes, and then at Canada College where, after completing a rigorous ESL sequence, she ultimately completed freshman-level college English. She then started taking paralegal classes with a goal of obtaining her paralegal certificate.

During her three-year tenure at Canada, Upward Scholars paid for Isabel's books, which often cost several hundred dollars a semester, gave her a laptop, and provided her with a volunteer tutor, Menlo Park resident Rick Trushel.

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Rick, a retired software engineer, says: "Witnessing Isabel achieve fluency in written and spoken English has been so rewarding. Seeing her honor commitments to her studies, family, and community inspires me as she puts her many talents to use in her new job."

Knowing about Isabel's outstanding academic record and her interest in legal issues, Upward Scholars staff referred her to an administrative assistant job opening at the International Institute of the Bay Area, a local nonprofit that provides immigration-related services to residents from low-income backgrounds.



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"Upward Scholars made my new job possible," Isabel says. "I'm happy because, in my new job, I'll be able to help other people the way Upward Scholars helped me."

Isabel says that learning English has also made her a better mother. "I want to be able to help my children with their homework and communicate with their teachers," Isabel says. "Now that I can speak English, I have the confidence to do that."

This semester Upward Scholars is supporting 280 students at Canada College, Skyline College, and College of San Mateo, up from 220 students a year ago.

Once Upward Scholars students are proficient in English, they are primed to move from low-wage occupations (less than \$18 an hour) into middle-wage occupations (between \$18 and \$30 an hour). After completing ESL classes, many go on to earn certificates in areas such as medical assisting, early childhood education, or bookkeeping, and a few transfer to four-year institutions.

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"By giving students the support they need to take advantage of high-quality, advanced ESL classes, we're providing them with opportunities that wouldn't otherwise be available," says Upward Scholars founder Elizabeth Weal. "Our work really is life-changing."

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Comments

Carol Cruikshank
 Menlo Park: The Willows on Dec 8, 2018 at 5:25 pm

I have been a tutor for Upward Scholars for a couple of years now and have been impressed and touched by the students I have worked with. They are hardworking, determined, and appreciative of the assistance that Upward Scholars gives them. It is very gratifying to see them overcome the many obstacles they face to achieve their their goals.

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Alison Elliott
 Menlo Park: The Willows on Dec 10, 2018 at 4:50 pm

A contribution to Upward Scholars leverages the initiative and determination of these scholars. I admire these students, many of whom are working adults with families, who attend local community colleges to master English and gain the knowledge and skills they need to succeed.

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Nancy Hosay
 Menlo Park: Linfield Oaks on Dec 10, 2018 at 5:28 pm

I have heard current and graduated students from Upward Scholars tell their stories; I also have friends who are tutors, who speak highly of both the students and the program itself. The drive and the work ethic of these students is extremely inspiring and I contribute to Upward Scholars so they can continue to do this very important work . I will continue to support this students' very organization, and by so doing, invest in the students' advancement and success.

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Jana Tuschman
 Menlo Park: South of Seminary/Vintage Oaks on Dec 10, 2018 at 10:17 pm

I support Upward Scholars as it is an investment not only in these students' and their families' futures, but also gives them the opportunity to contribute to our society in meaningful ways.

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Susan Russell
 Registered user
 Menlo Park: University Heights on Dec 11, 2018 at 12:06 pm

Upward Scholars is a wonderful organization. I've been involved with it as a member of the board and tutor since 2012. Enabling adult students--mostly immigrants--to attend community college helps not only them personally but also their families and the community at large. The students are hard-working and ambitious--working with them has been both satisfying and inspirational. As a Spanish-language-learner, I know how very difficult it is to learn a new language as an adult! Their persistence and determination are impressive. Please support Upward Scholars!

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Jonathan Fu
 Menlo Park: Fair Oaks on Dec 12, 2018 at 9:18 am

I currently oversee the English language programs at Sequoia Adult School where we transfer over 200 students per year to local community colleges and job training, many of which receive scholarships from Upward Scholars. Interacting with the many students we have in our program, it is clear that there is an opportunity gap for our students in our community, especially in the heart of the hi-tech sector where we are located. Upward Scholars has provided our students with the support they need to elevate themselves, their families, and communities.

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