

"Thank you Optimist and to the people who have supported me"

Good afternoon, my name is Victor and I am going to tell you about myself, my experiences and changes in my life while being in Optimist. I first came to Optimist on March 13, 2008 from Santa Clara County. Growing up, I was hanging around with negative people who were involved in gangs. My mentality was not good at this time. When I arrived to Optimist, I was first placed in C dorm on main campus. I was kind of lost because there are all these programs that I never did before: substance abuse, Narcotics Anonymous, anger management, therapy, art therapy, music therapy, and family group. At first, I didn't want to open up to the staff and social worker about my problems. A couple weeks passed by and I was looking at the program and how it really helped somebody in many ways. For myself, group therapy and family group helped me to speak up about my problems and things that I felt were not right, and most of all, helped me talk to my only parent, my mom. We have a good relationship now. Substance abuse, Narcotics Anonymous and my favorite drug counselor, Howard, helped me out to stay clean and away from drugs. I have been clean for two years. We go out in the community to other Narcotics Anonymous meetings with other adults—we are their inspiration to see young men like us wanting to stay clean. Staff have helped me to become a responsible and respectful young man.

The dorms helped me created structure in my life, learn to be on time for appointments and understand the meaning of work. After six months in the dorms, I was transferred to the South Bay Group Home because I was able to run a good program and graduate from C Dorm. There is was a different program and a different environment. When I arrived to the group home, I learned to cook for myself and other people, making delicious meals even though I still burned them sometimes. I began to accept that people are different from myself. Before I wanted nothing to do with people I didn't have anything in common with. However now when I saw my peers messing up or depressed, I would approach them and give them advice.

I also learned how to spend my money wisely and save money. My social skills improved helping me deal with different situations and helping me be comfortable talking to people. It was because of this program that I decided to pursue a career in nursing. I took a Medical Terminology class at East LA Occupational Center, then I went to Los Angeles County/USC Medical Center and started to volunteer. In December 2009, I transferred to the Independent Living Program (ILP). I learned not only how to cook, but how to budget money while grocery shopping. Now I have a schedule I follow on my own and I am learning to take care of myself without having to rely on anyone else. I have received many awards while at Optimist including Youth of the Month, Youth Appreciation Award, Japanese American Optimist Club Award and I was the Valedictorian at Optimist High School this past semester. I also received a Varsity Cross Country Certificate from Eagle Rock High School, where I am dually-enrolled. Because of this program, I became a young adult with a bright future ahead of me. Thank you Optimist and to the people who have supported me.

