

Where Are They Now?

"While at Optimist, Ms. Christine Taylor was like a second mother to me. She talked to me in a way no one ever had – and that was with love and understanding".

-Mario Ortiz, OYHFS former resident



Meet Mario Ortiz, a former Optimist youth who recently came back to thank us for never giving up on him.

Mario was born in Bellflower, California in the early 80's. His earliest childhood memories are best described as painful since he, his siblings and his mom were abused daily by his alcoholic father. After his parents divorced, his mother began to abuse the kids.

Mario and his brothers were bounced around from home to home and he realized that he never really felt love from either parent. When Mario was 9, he had a very close family member pass away and that's when he joined his "gang family". He said at that point he lost control of his life, was arrested and placed at Optimist in May of 1991.

While at Optimist, Mario was extremely violent and disruptive. Mario explained that, "I ran away several times, and each time, the program accepted me back.

Optimist and the staff were the only people who tried to help me find a different path, to veer away from my violent gang involvement. Because of my childhood trauma, the violence at home, and all I'd seen and heard, I wasn't open to the program. While at Optimist, Ms. Christine Taylor was like a second mother to me. She talked to me in a way no one ever had – and that was with love and understanding".

Mario continued, "After leaving Optimist in 1995, I went to prison. While in prison, I began to think about all those talks with Ms. Christine and the Optimist staff and realized that I wanted more, and deserved more. I began to work on myself, and took advantage of all the self-help lessons I was given".

Today, Mario works at Homeboy Industries and is working towards bringing about change to his community and encouraging youth through his life experiences. He's excited about life and expressed gratitude to Optimist for never giving up on him.