

Local Youth Take on Big Roles



Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Redlands-Riverside Youth of the Year Ambassadors, clockwise from bottom left -- Isabel Cruz of Highland, Christopher Monterroza of Redlands, Tyryn Cleveland of Redlands and Adrian Chavez of Yucaipa.

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REDLANDS -- Four local high school students have been named Youth of the Year Ambassadors for Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Redlands-Riverside.

The ambassadors – Adrian Chavez, Isabel Cruz, Tyryn Cleveland and Christopher Monterroza – were chosen for their character and citizenship, academics and commitment to a healthy lifestyle. They each wrote essays on three topics – club experience, their personal brand, and their vision for America’s youth – gave a short speech on how the club has impacted them, and were interviewed by a panel of judges.

The ambassadors will serve as spokespeople for the clubs and will be honored at club events in spring. They also receive college scholarships. The ambassador chosen as the club’s Youth of the Year competes later this month against other youths in Riverside and San Bernardino counties and, if he or she wins, advances to the state competition.

Chavez, a senior at Redlands East Valley High School, said she wants to get a criminal justice degree and work in law enforcement. She is involved in Keystone Club, a Boys & Girls Clubs’ teen leadership and community service program, and works at the club as part of its Junior Staff program.

“When I first came (to the club), I had been struggling academically due to my ADHD. I also had very low self-esteem and anger issues that I did not know how to deal with. I felt alone, like I was an outsider,” Chavez said.

At the club, she said she found a place she felt she belonged, and club staff pushed her to work hard in school. Now, she has a high GPA and wants to help others.

“I imagine our juvenile justice system is filled with youths often viewed just like I was and expected to fail in life,” she said. “But I believe we can save their futures by creating supportive programs and environments where they are taught that they can succeed.”

Cruz, a junior at Citrus Valley High School, said she hopes to be an author or journalist after college. She was subject to teasing in elementary and middle school, and by the time she came to Boys & Girls Club, she said she was insecure and did not care about school. Since then, she said “being a member of the club has opened my eyes to how important personal growth is for teens who have been in my position. It showed me that no matter how many times I fall due to someone’s negative judgement, I can get up and keep moving forward with my newly gained confidence.”

Additionally, she said, “having self-confidence through my strong relationships with staff and peers has also driven me to higher academic goals.”

At the club, Cruz volunteers for events as part of Keystone Club, and is active in other programs. She also volunteers at her church. She said she hopes to use her platform at the club to help other teens build confidence and resist “self-bullying.”

Cleveland, a junior at Citrus Valley, is the first person in his family to not drop out of school. He said he wants to use the club to draw attention to how the media affects young people’s body image.

“If it was not for my club experience, I would have been one more victim of this,” he said.

At the club, he also found first-time experiences, adult role models, and the resiliency and positivity to fight his anger at challenges in his life.

“The anger I felt was the greatest obstacle I have had to overcome,” he said. “However, I decided to have these trials and tribulations fuel my desire to move forward with my life.”

Cleveland is on his school’s track and field team and is working toward his Eagle Scout designation in Boy Scouts. After high school, he wants to serve in the military and have a family.

Monterroza, a senior at REV, said he was inspired to encourage teens to help each other through stress after going through school and puberty with no father figure.

“Since coming to the club, I have become more task-oriented dealing with the workload given to me and I was able to create a full support system that I lacked previously,” he said.

Through club programs like Keystone, he learned new things and developed an appreciation for community service. His mother inspired him to pursue a career in the medical field and to help those in need.

“My mother and the Boys & Girls Club have shown me how the world works and have prepared me for all the hardships that come with it,” he said.

Monterroza has ROP certificates from school in small business and medical assisting.