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Volunteer Finds Voice

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Volunteer finds voice

From the depth of a depression, Elizabeth Guzman '14 found joy in serving others – an awakening that gave her life shape and meaning.

At 15, Guzman struggled with depression, unable to find focus in her life. Finding passion in community projects changed that. Now she dreams of becoming a business owner and launching a non-profit that will foster youth leadership and advocacy.

Articulate and quick to laugh, Guzman juggles Linfield classes with a job in the financial aid office and volunteer work for Linfield Latinos Adelante. In addition, she is the advisor for the Youth Advisory Council of the Oregon School-Based Health Care Network. But she's more than just an advisor. The Youth Advisory Council was her brain child. She proposed it, organized it and funded it.

Guzman's work with Boys and Girls Club gave her a taste of community service which she took close to home. At 16, she helped organize a school-based health center at her high school in Forest Grove to serve youth with little or no access to health care or health insurance.

"A lot of people I knew in high school did not have health insurance," said Guzman. "For many, going to the doctor was just too expensive. Having a health care center at school was a great benefit to them."

School-based health centers operate like a standard health clinic, prescribing medicine, referring patients to doctors as needed and also offering psychiatric services. Last year alone, over 24,000 Oregon students benefitted from health center services.

The 55 certified school-based health centers are supported by Oregon's School-Based Health Care Network, which offers support including lobbying for services from the state and federal government and private insurance agencies.

As Guzman became involved with OSBHCN, she proposed establishing the Youth Advisory Council to involve students as leaders in their local schools and communities.

Once approved, the work began. Guzman researched how to write a charter, created bylaws and wrote grants for funding. She found other students interested in the project and, with their help, established youth advisory councils across the state.

> *"My parents grew up in Mexico and don't speak English," said Guzman. "Even though I can speak Spanish, translating some of the terms involved in these projects is hard for me to do. They may not always understand what it is I am doing, but that has not stopped them from noticing a change in my maturity level."*

"It is important for youth to be involved," said Guzman. "It sounds cliché, but one day we will be running our society and we need to understand how to do these things."

Youth advisory councils provide leadership opportunities for young people to campaign for health benefits that directly affect them and their peers. So far, Guzman has helped train over 200 youth leaders and hopes to expand the number of councils across the state.

"A lot of the time, young people are not given the training or encouragement to reach their full potential," she said. "I want to start an organization that will help to train youth leaders to help them reach their goals."

Guzman said before becoming involved in community projects, she was shy and uninterested in her life. Now, she is confident and continues to set new goals for herself and the councils she pioneered.

"Community service gave my life more meaning," she said. "All the people I've met on different projects have had incredible views on life and society. Being able to learn from them has been life-changing."

Guzman is conquering goals and finding enthusiasm in life. She now works to provide the same opportunities to others, so that they too may find their passion and become leaders.

– Alison Bouchard '12

As a first-generation college student, Elizabeth Guzman '14 is making her family proud.