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Ex-foster children on track for success

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LA VERNE - Victor Alveno has had his share of challenges to overcome in his 19 years.

He spent much of his childhood in foster care in La Puente and Pomona. His story sounds all-too-familiar until his junior year at Garey High School in Pomona.

"I went to school but caused trouble. I was rebellious and really didn't care, and then I realized I could do better. I started making plans," Alveno said.

He made a lot of plans:

High school graduation - check.

Settle down and channel his energies in a positive direction - check.

Reconnect with a high school girlfriend - check.

And his plans continued, but it wasn't until he went to live at LeRoy Haynes Center in La Verne that they were able to take root.

The center treats and teaches young people with special needs related to emotional development,

autism, Asperger's disease, learning disabilities, neglect or abandonment.

Boys are allowed to stay in the residential program until they are 18 years old. They then they become part of the transitional living facility on the La Verne campus. The program is open to young men, ages 18 to 24, who have been emancipated from foster care. It offers a wide range of services to prepare them to be self-sufficient.

More than 10 months ago, Alveno moved into this home, and his dreams started taking off. He has spent the last year taking as many classes as he could at Citrus College in Glendora.

With the support of Haynes Center's transitional living program and its director, Jason Green, he found some stability. With the loving encouragement of his longtime girlfriend, Adriana Avila, herself a foster-care student attending Citrus College with an eye toward becoming a surgeon, he found a kindred spirit.

And with a 3.8 grade-point average during the past school year, he has found success. His goal is to graduate in the spring, register at a police academy and then go back to school - probably Cal State Los Angeles - to complete his studies. He would like to be a police officer or federal agent.

"He has been with me for 10 months and has been on fire with his goals since the day he came. He has attended college beyond full-time. I have witnessed his incredible study habits, skipping social events and pulling all-nighters while working with his girlfriend at achieving their goals together," Green said.

He said all the credit should go to Alveno.

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"He came to me with all of his dreams, plans and goals. All he needed was a home. All this is him. He's made my job a joy just watching him succeed," Green said.

"This is a testament to Victor and his hard work and to the transitional living program and how it works to change lives."

Alveno said his motivation comes from his past.

"I didn't have parents to help out. Jason has been like a father figure to me. He listens. He's always talking to me. I want a better future, and I can get that by taking advantage of the opportunity I have been given. I hope other foster kids can see if I can make, so can they, and I want people to know that foster kids need their help. Transitional living programs like this one are important," he said.

Avila agreed.

"Getting an education is important. We study together. We both want better and a good future for us. I really understand where all his motivation comes from," she said.

Together, Alveno and Avila, who is 18 years old and lives in a Pomona foster home, are seizing the opportunities life is offering.

"I admire them for their unique ability to pull their resources together and make their dreams happen," Green said.

Dan Maydeck is the president and chief executive officer of LeRoy Haynes Center. He said he couldn't be prouder of Alveno and his accomplishments.

"To see a young man like Victor, with all the uphill challenges he has had to face, make a commitment and wanting to serve his country, well, we are all extremely proud of him," Maydeck said.

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