

CARLOS BARRIENTOS

BGCCC 2020 Youth of the Year



My friends and I were having one of those perfect days. We were driving and listening to our favorite Beatles album: Sgt Peppers. I remember feeling the hum of my phone and knew it was my mom, the Worrier. Briefly I thought about not answering, but something told me I should. Don't ignore your parents!

I picked up the phone, like I always did. That was our deal.

"They took your dad and uncles from us they're going to be deported. ..." Her sorrows passed through the phone. My heart sank for my dad and especially for my mom.

I was in shock. "Mom, you shouldn't joke like that!" ... I was wrong.

Perspective is one of my favorite words. It's a particular attitude or way of seeing something, a point of view. Putting yourself in the shoes of others. The Boys & Girls Club has always given me the right perspective.

From my perspective, the Club is a place where people see the best in you. We always heard it: Be Great. The Club instilled a great work ethic in me.

NOBODY works harder than my mom and dad. For years I've helped with their business: Gio Stucco. I help with translation and computers. I taught myself programs to help with floor plans. It's cool.

I should tell you now that my dad is still with us. But my mom and I had to fight for him. Letters, court, more letters. My mom fought the most, of course. It seemed like she had to change everyone's perspective. And she did. She's my hero!

All of my uncles were deported to Guatemala though. My uncle Wito died from heart failure after being deported. I know he would be alive if he had not been deported. He couldn't get the health care he needed there. Imagine the stress of leaving your life

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ATHENA KINTGEN

BGCA 2019/2020 Southwest Region YOY



"Pay attention; look at my eyes." My first grade teacher, Ms. Bryan, would start each day asking us to practice respect. However, I'd be watching her lips trying to comprehend what she was saying. The class would often start without my noticing and I'd end up in the principal's office because I wasn't listening. But what if I couldn't hear?

I don't blame Ms. Bryan for misunderstanding; none of my family or I knew at the time. It wasn't until I was older that I was informed about my hearing deteriorating, the result of nerve damage. After I learned that my hearing wasn't going to get better, I understood that I needed to learn how to support myself and find the courage to ask others for help as well.

At the Club, like school, listening is important. Although, listening doesn't solely mean hearing. It means understanding the person – it's how you show you care and make connections. There is more than one way to connect with someone; sign language being one of them.

I believe a home is the place you should feel safe first. Unfortunately I grew up with an alcoholic father. He would often bring strange men home with him, show up to my Christmas concerts drunk – if he decided to show up at all – and was almost always screaming at my mother. I still think of him sometimes. I remember the nights where he was supposed to feed me, but instead came home in a drunken stupor and went to bed. So I would too.

My father passed away when I was 9 years old: hepatitis C and alcohol poisoning. Because of him, I found trusting others difficult and still do sometimes. Being incapable of helping him is what kick-started my passion for helping others, especially those who need it most. That is the mission of the Boys & Girls Club that I support wholeheartedly.

Growing up I was insecure because I was the girl

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and family behind. What does that do to your heart?

If people put themselves in my dad's shoes, in my mom's shoes, they'd see things differently, believe me.

My favorite memories from the Club are the classes: Khan Academy, Cowboy Ethics, Torch Club, STEM classes like the Arkansas River Monster.

What I love about the Club the most is the feeling I've always gotten from the staff. They believe in me, especially Scotty.

The first time I came to the Club Scotty gave me a high five and surprisingly, recognized me. He was patient, and best of all, he skateboarded. I've always wanted to be like him. He made me feel like somebody.

The Club has always made me feel strong and confident. I want to help people overcome loneliness, give people a reason to connect. I want to change people by giving them the opportunity to change how they see things. Perspective.

I love that my Club is inclusive, it's for everyone. Last week I talked to Mo and Izzy at the Club, two little guys who reminded me of what I was like when I started at the Club 9 years ago. They ran up to me and I felt like I was 10 feet tall. From their perspective I was!

I'm proud to say the Boys & Girls Club put me on the right path. It kept me out of trouble.

I hope to major in architecture in college. Working for my dad definitely inspired me. I've been accepted to NYU, Colorado State and Denver University.

Put yourself in my shoes. From my perspective, things are looking pretty good. Give back to your community and don't be quick to judge someone on the street – you don't know their story. Try to learn their story. It makes a difference.

Thank you for listening to my story and thank you for being part of the Boys & Girls Club.

ATHENA KINTGEN, continued

who was repeatedly asking you to repeat yourself. When I spoke, I often spoke loudly. (I still do sometimes, when I'm moved).

Now I volunteer with the Extraordinary Teen Council and teach sign language to the community, at the elementary school and at the Club. With ETC, we fight to prevent teens from indulging in drugs and other risky behaviors. I've also advocated for a sign language class to be offered to our schools and in the community. I feel like I'm making a difference, and there is nothing I take more pride in than that.

As a young person who wants to do more, I feel that the world is at our fingertips. I suppose in my case, it really is! My advocacy and teaching sign language isn't solely for the language – it's for the discussions. When you speak with sign language it's personal; it incorporates your entire body and demands eye contact. I suppose what Ms. Bryan had tried to teach me years ago came after all. Since I've been teaching at the Club, I've noticed that more of our kids want to help others. It may be the quietest activity the Club provides, but our kids know how to listen more now than they ever did before.

Thank you for listening to my story. Thank you for supporting and being a part of the Boys and Girls Club family.