

Lakewood SENTINEL

HED Youth turns life in right direction DECK Lakewood girl hopes to help others in bad situations

By Ryan Parker

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Three years ago Lakewood resident Kiara Arguello would have laughed in someone's face if they asked her if she would graduate from high school.

The 18-year-old is recovering from addiction to drugs. With the help from family, and the treatment center she is currently in, Arguello was able to get clean and earn her diploma through the Hope Online Learning Academy.

"I didn't grow up in the hood, it was actually a nice neighborhood, but that's where the money and drugs were," Arguello said. Using drugs such as cocaine at the age of 14, Arguello said she had no plans for her life outside of being high.

"I didn't care about an education and thought I couldn't do it anyway," she said.

Now Arguello will work as a mentor for the online school before she goes to college in Pennsylvania, she said. "I want to help people just like I was when I needed it the most," she said.

Becky Fredriksz, director Center of Hope, Arguello's treatment center, said the girl came to the shelter as a child with the mind of an adult. "She got bad grades when she was in school and thought she had no chance of making them up," Fredriksz said.

With constant support from the shelter and school staff, Arguello worked night and day to make up all the classes she had let settle for failing grades, Fredriksz said.

Now with her life on track, Arguello plans for her future, a future she had never given much thought to before now, she said. "I want to be there for other girls who are scared and want to change their life, like I was able to," she said.

Fredriksz said Arguello is strong, but needed support from others to stick to her goals and the plan to change herself. "She now wants to be the one who supports others. She has really grown," Fredriksz said.

Online schooling worked for Arguello because she was able to work on all courses for hours a day in order to make up grades and catch up with her education level. If she had attempted to re-enroll in a traditional high school, the time element would have gotten the better of her, she said. Meaning Arguello could have only progressed as far as the daily class lesson, but she needed to move faster and assimilate more information, she said.

Arguello's time at Center of Hope is almost at an end, but the 18-year-old said her journey is just getting under way. "I didn't know what I would do with my life. I didn't care, but now I am ready," Arguello said. Arguello will study ministry at Mount Zion International School of Ministry in Pennsylvania.

For more information on Hope Online Learning Academy, visit hopeco-op.org. For more information on Center of Hope, call 303-935-1276.