



Photo: Maria Valencia.

## How Maria Cristina Valencia's Children Encouraged Her to Pursue a Higher Education

While trying to motivate her youngest to stay in school, Maria Cristina Valencia was thrown a curve ball when asked why she never got a high school diploma.

The year was 2014, and Valencia and her son Alder were arguing because he did not want to go to school. But after things settled down, the now 50-year-old said she had a realization: Alder was right.

"So, I enrolled at (Yucaipa) Adult School and got my high school diploma," explained the Yucaipa resident.

But she wasn't done yet. With encouragement from her family and the Yucaipa Adult School, Maria enrolled in her first class at Crafton in the summer of 2019 in pursuit of a higher education.

In May 2022 – with Alder by her side – Valencia graduated from Crafton Hills College with an associate degree in Spanish, and has plans to attend Cal State San Bernardino in the fall to focus on pursuing a bachelor's in early childhood development.

Valencia's major motivation: her children.

"It was a family goal," she continued. "(Alder) was the one who inspired me. He was the one who kicked my butt."

Valencia migrated to the United States

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after leaving El Salvador during the Civil War. She worked while raising her two sons – now in their 20s – and added school to her already busy schedule to prove to herself that she “could do it.”

“Maria was one of my hardest working students,” said Marcia Stewart, a teacher at Yucaipa Adult School (YAS). “She completed her schoolwork every week, even as she was working two to three jobs, and has always inspired me and other

students with her great work ethic.”

“Maria is the embodiment of perseverance and determination,” Stewart continued. “She is an incredible woman, and I am so honored I got to witness part of her journey.”

Her children also took notice.

Alder also graduated in May with his AA in Business Administration, and plans on joining his mom on campus at CSUSB in the fall as well.

Valencia knows there's still a lot of work ahead and is up to the challenge, citing public speaking was one of her toughest courses to date and that there's potential on the horizon for similar challenging courses along the way.

“Before starting (public speaking), I was in a bit of a panic that I couldn't speak in front of someone because of my English,” she explained. “But everybody, every single person encouraged me not to be afraid - and to not be afraid of my accent.”

As far as the biggest piece of advice for students following in her footsteps, Valencia has one key word: Persist.

“Never give up because right now, there's a lot of help out there. But if you don't ask, you will never get that help,” she said. “I never thought I could graduate from Crafton, but otherwise, I would just be sitting down doing nothing.”

Each year, Crafton and YAS partner to help students pursue a higher education. This last semester, Roadrunner officials worked closely with 22 YAS adult learners by providing them with necessary resources to make their educational goals a reality. Eight YAS learners are currently enrolled in either Crafton's summer or fall semester credit courses, while two YAS students are participating in the site's Adult Summer Bridge Program, of which Valencia is an alumna of.

To learn more about the program or Crafton, go to [craftonhills.edu](http://craftonhills.edu)