



## NEWS RELEASE

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### **Students complete pilot STEM and Work Readiness Training program at Gilroy OYA**

**SAN JOSE, CA** – A pilot program with Opportunity Youth Academy (OYA) is firsthand proof of the power of cross-agency collaboration. Three OYA students from Gilroy and another five from San Jose joined a total of 32 students from Santa Clara County who successfully completed the [STEM and Work Readiness Training program](#), celebrating with a ceremony at The Tech Museum of Innovation on Saturday, May 28.

“I think it was a good opportunity to try new things,” said 22-year-old Geovane Alonso, who was a part of the Gilroy program. “I’m a little sad because I’m not going to get to attend anymore.”

As part of completing the nine-week Saturday program, Alonso and 44 foster youth from the San Jose and South County cohorts will be placed in internships this summer with employers including Symantec and QuantumScape Corporation. This is an increase from the 16 youth that were placed last year through the training program, a collaboration between Silicon Valley Children’s Fund and TeenForce.

TeenForce Executive Director John Hogan founded the nonprofit in 2010 as a staffing agency matching teens with jobs in multiple sectors. After five years, Hogan realized that the foster youth population he served weren’t working their way up in careers and thinking outside of the social service industry. So he made a commitment at the June 2014 Clinton Global Initiative America meeting to offer STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) and work readiness training to reach 100 percent of the high school foster youth in Santa Clara County.

“Because we’re based out of Silicon Valley, John wanted to provide exposure to the foster youth and show that a career in engineering or computer programming is something that you’re able to reach with a little bit of hard work and determination,” said Sonya Trac, TeenForce Outcomes and Program Manager.

When they were searching for a facility to pilot to South County youth, TeenForce found the Gilroy site of [Opportunity Youth Academy](#) (OYA). Launched in November 2015, OYA is a high school diploma completion opportunity for 16- to 24-year-olds which focuses on paths to college or career training.

“OYA was the best location because there are students attending the academy in foster care,” Trac said.

OYA Principal Gerry Lopez said he is thankful for the collaboration to bring more opportunities to those students they serve.

“The partnership with SVCF and TeenForce is a perfect example of ‘collective impact,’” he said. “Separately, our organizations would have found a way to carry out our individual program pursuits: credit accrual, STEM focus, services to foster youth, and workforce development. However, collectively, our pertinent goals are met, our resources are better utilized, and our collaboration acts as a force multiplier.”

The nine-week Saturday program is a two-pronged approach where students learn both STEM and work readiness. During the STEM portion of the class, students learned how to build and program their own robot, and for work readiness they learned how to write a resume, fill out job applications, complete mock interviews, and properly dress for work.

“When they’re done with the program, the students will walk away with at least 40 hours of STEM training and 20 hours of work readiness training,” Trac said.

STEM Program Coordinator Stephany Fuentes said it has been wonderful to lead the work readiness portion of the program.

“There’s a couple of our youth that have changed dramatically,” she said. “We have seen a variety of successes and personal growth.”

Hogan added that he has also witnessed the relationship as a win-win for all involved, and he is happy to be a part of the impact being made at the ground level.

“Yesterday an OYA student told me, ‘Ever since I started with OYA, doors have been opening everywhere for me. I’m so appreciative of the support,’” Hogan shared. “That tells me all I need to know about the school’s impact on youth inside the school and beyond.”

*For more information about the program, view the [brochure](#).*

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