

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

LOCALLY GROWN LEADERSHIP

**A YOUNG GIRL FOUND FUN AND VOLUNTEERISM AT THE Y;
SHE ALSO FOUND A H.O.M.E. AND A CAREER**
Monday, July 23, 2018



The Y is more than a fitness facility and summer camp. We are an open door to limitless possibilities for people from every background. Sharon Perez, a YMCA Youth & Family Services Community School Coordinator with the Linkages to Learning program, is proof of the possibilities. Sharon came to the Y as a teenager at Bethesda Chevy Chase High School through the H.O.M.E. (**Hope and Opportunities in a Multicultural Environment**) program. H.O.M.E. supports the youth in-and-out of the school by providing **Student Service Learning** and **leadership development** opportunities, **after school recreation** (soccer/basketball), and **lunchtime civic engagement groups**.



Sharon was a recent immigrant from a family of non-native English speakers. Like many others, she was adjusting to a new environment, culture, and language all-at-once; and fortunately, H.O.M.E. was there to help build a community around her. Sharon took advantage of every opportunity and she excelled: she became the soccer team's manager, she attended leadership conferences, and enjoyed outdoor adventures at YMCA Camp Letts. Her soccer coach and other staff welcomed her and connected her to a diverse group of young people. Furthermore, YMCA staff helped strengthen her relationship with her family by motivating and supporting their attendance and participation in family camp at Camp Letts.

Beyond all of these formative experiences, if you ask Sharon how the program impacted her most, she says that **"It really helped me become a leader."** The H.O.M.E. program exposed Sharon to opportunities she could have never even imagined, from Zip lining high in the air to meeting other Maryland Latino youth leaders at a leadership conference at Towson University, many of whom she connected with later as a student at the University of Maryland. With support from the program and the soccer coach, Sharon went on to become the **president of the International Club in high school**, joined a sorority in college, and is now a **community leader** using networking skills gained from the program to connect the families she serves with needed resources. As staff at the Y, her **passion is to help others the way that the Y helped her:**



"Even if I'm not the person that fixes their troubles, I want to lead them to that person and I want to empower them".

The lessons learned at the Y and the influence it made on Sharon's life, had a profound impact that continues to motivate her to empower countless more people young and old.

To this day, the Y continues to provide recreation and leadership opportunities to the families in the Rosemary Hills community—many of who come from families where parents often work several jobs and/or long hours. The goal of the program is to expose young people to new opportunities and help them become leaders in their communities. The Y is committed to provide **healthy, educational, and empowering opportunities for the youth to build positive habits, obtain valuable skills like public speaking, and learn how to become more civically engaged.**

Building compassionate and capable leaders is necessary to build a safe and prosperous neighborhood, community, state and country. Doing so starts with the individual, it starts with HOME. Do you have experience with or interest in working with the youth? Are you an athlete or community member looking to make a positive impact? Have you ever thought about joining the Y movement?

Contact Adrian Stewart at Adrian.Stewart@ymcadc.org to find a way to serve today!