

MIANI GIRON: HORATIO ALGER SCHOLARSHIP WINNER

By Sikivu Hutchinson



Community and Senior Services' Human Relations Commission's Zerohour school program has helped many students reach their dreams. Zerohour initiated the Women's Leadership Project (WLP), a mentoring program that trains young women of color on how to get involved in their school community, how to develop leadership skills, and how to plan for college and careers.

Miani Giron is a senior at Gardena High School and president of the school's Women's Leadership Project. She was recently awarded a prestigious \$20,000 Horatio Alger Association scholarship for community service, character, and academic excellence.

Miani is one of two students in California to receive this national award. This spring she will travel to Washington D.C. to attend a conference for Alger awardees. She recently received a full scholarship to Syracuse University's pre-med program and is awaiting news on other campuses.

WLP provides students with one-on-one college and scholarship counseling, resourcing and advisement.

Following is an interview with Miani:

What is your background and what are your goals in life?

I identify as Hispanic or Latino but more specifically as a Puerto Rican of African descent. People always assume that I am Mexican and speak Spanish but my mother is African American. I have volunteered at the local library as a tutor in English and Math.

I also volunteer on Saturdays with community events at the library and I've volunteered at the Gardena Wilderness Preserve with clean-up, plantings and other maintenance. I'm currently in the C&A nursing assistant program, volunteering at a local nursing home, where I feed and wash patients. I'm enjoying this the most because I want to pursue a career in the medical field. I'm interested in Pediatrics, Psychiatry or Psychology.

In the three years that you have been involved in WLP how has it changed or shaped your view of the world when it comes to gender and race issues?

It has shifted my thinking a lot because I really didn't know about issues like HIV/AIDS and how it was specific to me and my community. WLP has made me think about issues that are degrading towards women and made me more conscious. It made me more interested in talking to young women in my community. We're encouraged to advocate and do things in our own school-community and talk to our peers.

What were some of the best or most rewarding experiences you had with WLP?

The experience with going to the Cal State University Dominguez Hills forum and talking to middle school students about gender issues and stereotypes really stood out to me. I see self-hatred amongst women in terms of abuse. A lot of women feel that you can't change it. Women internalize it, because men are dominant.

Women feel hopeless that they can't do anything about it because it's been going on for so long. I see it in some of my female relatives who feel that they have to be in a relationship and take the verbal abuse from their partners. I want to be stable in my life and have a career.

At school we see girls who are pregnant and there are all these reality shows that promote pregnancy. I don't want to lead my life that way. These issues make me want to encourage girls of color to seek out other opportunities.

So what advice do you have for other young women of color who don't have college role models?

I would want to show them that it is possible. Gardena did prepare me for college to some extent because I was always in the college career center. However, I had to seek the information out whenever I had free time.

I started getting support when I joined WLP. Before then I didn't have anyone that was actively encouraging me and I would show other girls that there is a different life out there and you don't have to limit yourself.