

Tierra's NEXUS Students — Making College to Career A Reality

Postsecondary education is an endeavor only the bravest of brave pursue—endless assignments and books to read, countless exams and sleepless nights, new professors every 15 weeks and never-ending project lists. Going to college is a choice most people make knowing that the road ahead will be a challenging one. For some, the choice is encouraged, expected even. For others, college is considered downright impossible and encouragement, aside from family members, is often absent altogether.

Felipe Alfaro, Nina Adel, Grace Hahn, and Rocio Gutierrez are four phenomenal individuals who understand what it means to defy the impossible. Along with 140 other students, these four students in Tierra's NEXUS College to Career Program are surpassing all expectations, and discovering their greatest intellectual and personal potential; despite what they were told, or not told, they could do.

Since its inception in 2007, NEXUS has provided academic and professional skills mentorship to hopeful undergrads who experience the program through the process of a three phase model – Discovery, Education, and Internship. With partnerships at Los Angeles Valley, Mission, and Pierce Colleges, as well as West Valley Occupational Center, and California State University Northridge (CSUN), individuals with developmental disabilities are obtaining certifications and degrees, and ultimately transitioning into meaningful employment.

Meet Felipe

Reflecting on his fourth and final week in Discovery, 25 year-old Felipe Alfaro exclaims, "I toured CSUN, Pierce College, and West Valley, but I really liked CSUN!" While it's only been one month for Felipe and his cohorts, the skills and knowledge obtained during Discovery will impact NEXUS students the rest of their lives. NEXUS Program Director, Gricelda Gonzalez, explains,



"Discovery is an intense phase, and the first 30 days are critical for our clients. They explore local industries for prospective employment/volunteer opportunities, discuss and visit colleges, and map out a plan to help them visualize their goals through PATH: Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope."

In 2010, Felipe enrolled in the LAUSD Center for Advanced Transition Services Program (CATS). While it was a good experience, he confesses, "After graduating in 2013, I didn't do anything for three years. I was doing well, but Regional Center realized I needed support. So, I came to Tierra, and now, I've completed the Discovery Phase and am going to Mission College."

For clients like Felipe, the individualized support and encouragement from Tierra's NEXUS staff is what propels them to continue moving forward. NEXUS Intake Coordinator Aaron Riner, shares, **"There are no barriers to anything, as long as you have a good support system. We are always here to motivate students, so they can do well and believe that each one of them is capable of accomplishing greatness."**

Continued on page 6

Become an Inspiration in 2017.

As we kick-off our 2017 Circle of Inspiration Campaign, we are truly grateful to those who continue to invest in our values, vision and mission. We welcome the individuals, companies and organizations who are charter and first-time members to renew their investment in Tierra, and encourage NEW families, partner organizations and community supporters to JOIN OUR CIRCLE.

Join us in sustaining the quality programs and services that will launch the individuals we serve into a fully-integrated environment where they are empowered to achieve excellence in all that they do. Through Workforce Development, College to Career and Careers in the Arts, Tierra is changing the way that people think about individuals with developmental disabilities.

Details to join the Circle of Inspiration can be found on the donate page at tierradelsol.org, or contact Cathy Galarneau, CDO, at cgalarnau@tierradelsol.org.

“I think many parents and family members forget that Tierra’s services are not fully funded by the government. If we don’t support the quality programs and services Tierra provides our loved ones, we are only depriving them of the best care possible. I know my daughter deserves that kind of care, which is why my entire family gives generously each year to Tierra’s Circle of Inspiration Campaign. I hope all families will do their part to help Tierra continue doing their excellent work.”

Karren McClenahan
Circle of Inspiration Chair

Giving Opportunities

Visionary

Gifts of \$50,000 or more

Innovator

\$25,000 - \$49,999

Partner

\$10,000 - \$24,999

Advocate

\$5,000 - \$9,999

Benefactor

\$2,500 - \$4,999

Patron

\$1,500 - \$2,499

Friend

\$1,000 - \$1,499



Message From Rebecca Lienhard, CEO

It is hard to believe that 2017 is upon us. The accomplishments of 2016 gave us much to be grateful for, and a strong foundation on which to grow in the coming year. With the efforts of our mission focused on Workforce Development, College to Career, and Careers in the Arts, the successes of those we support have multiplied. We are proud to share their stories with you, as well as what transpired this past year.

104 individuals are now starting their day directly at their worksites. This not only reduces long periods of unnecessary travel time and transportation services, but also allows them to spend more time with their co-workers and friends, while contributing to the economic affairs of our community.

29 young men and women have fully transitioned off the Sunland Campus and into integrated employment, both volunteer and paid. Of the 173 individuals served daily on the Sunland campus, 75% are volunteering at local non-profits where they are valued for their contributions to the civic and spiritual affairs of others and helping to strengthen our communities.

138 students are being served at our local community colleges, attaining certifications, and A.A. degrees. Six students are being supported to earn a bachelor’s degree at California State University Northridge (CSUN), where they are accepted for their strengths and assets.

70 artists are successfully showing and selling their work, both nationally and internationally, including shows in Cork, Ireland and Paris, France, where their art impacts the cultural affairs of our community, worldwide.

These numbers do not solely define who we are, but they do represent that you, your children and your families, not only believe in hard work, but also in the certainty that our communities are stronger when all people, regardless of the notion of disability, are accepted and valued for their contributions.

All persons served in 2016, explored their possibilities to lead a full, productive and personally meaningful life and are taking clear, confident steps towards their unique futures. You, our greatest supporters, have heard their voices of success, and have been willing to contribute to our mutual partnership, proven by a 10% increase in annual giving donations over 2015. *We are truly grateful for that support!*

2017 can, and will, further define who we are as people, as families, and as an organization, as we continue to explore what more lies ahead for each and every individual served.



“By taking advantage of my company’s matching gifts program, I’ve been able to double our gift and help Tierra further its mission more each year.”

Pat & Kevin Moore
Charter Members

Tierra Celebrates the Holidays!

Community fundraisers; volunteer projects; The BLVD wreath, tile and textile workshops and a two-week Holiday Boutique made the holidays a special time at Tierra.

Thanks to all of our families, friends and community partners for your generosity and many contributions!



Sunland Studio Fine Arts Director, Maria Jones (center) is joined by client workshop students, Janelly Hernandez and Angelly Tallmantes.



2016 marked the 42nd year that Vito Cannella & his daughter, Grace Chase (L to R with daughter/sister Anna), organized a wonderful Christmas party at Holy Redeemer–St. James the Less Church in Montrose. Tierra clients, families, and friends—along with other guests from local providers of services for people with developmental disabilities—enjoyed lunch, entertainment, and gifts, all hosted by the generous parishioners of Holy Redeemer. Proceeds benefitting Tierra del Sol exceeded \$5,400! Thank you, Vito, Grace and your many generous friends, family members, colleagues, and neighbors in Montrose!



Tierra's Sunland gardens got a make-over when LA Exchange volunteers gave back with a green thumb during The Exchange Holiday Volunteer Project.

The Progressive Art Studios of Tierra del Sol

The accomplishments of the artists of Tierra del Sol are prolific, and accessible for all to experience. Their amazing creative works, curated exhibitions, commissioned original art, presentations of their creative process, in-depth exhibition profiles, and roles as instructors in a variety of workshops, are the result of the dedication and talent of the hardworking artists who embrace Sunland Studio Arts and First Street Gallery.

These are the progressive art studios of the Tierra del Sol.

"Progressive art studios" refers to places inclusively designed for artists with disabilities to advance their professional careers in the arts. Each studio provides opportunities for individuals to develop creative art practices, as well as technical skills, in addition to housing a professional gallery which represents the artists and encourages career management. The term "progressive arts studios," is powerful because it identifies these artists for the global recognition they've achieved and acknowledges them as leaders in the world of art and culture—with no exclusions or separate categories.

At Tierra, the innovation of our progressive arts studios goes beyond the creation of art, by developing professional career choices through a variety of vocational pursuits. Individuals may

choose to become exhibiting artists and will develop a portfolio of work to build a resume of increasingly important exhibitions.

Becoming an arts educator,

by learning to design lesson plans, lead classes and conduct presentations, is another option, while others choose to develop a career in arts management, curation and exhibit design. It is not uncommon for some to become successful entrepreneurs who plan, research and launch a successful art business. Of course, the most meaningful career may be a customized blending of all of these skills and vocations.

Keep a close watch on these artists in 2017, as they are "Ambassadors of the Possible." You will see the emergence of artists running businesses, an increase in new workshops and art classes and the launching of successful exhibition careers.

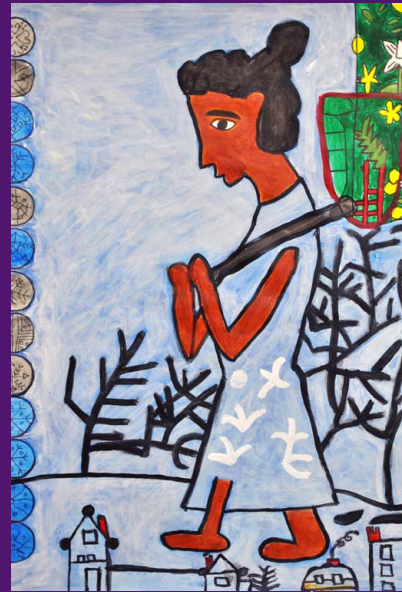
1 FIRST STREET GALLERY
Art Center
of the Tierra del Sol Foundation



Tierra Artists C



Sarita



Evelyn Campos



Trina Kirk

Helen Rae

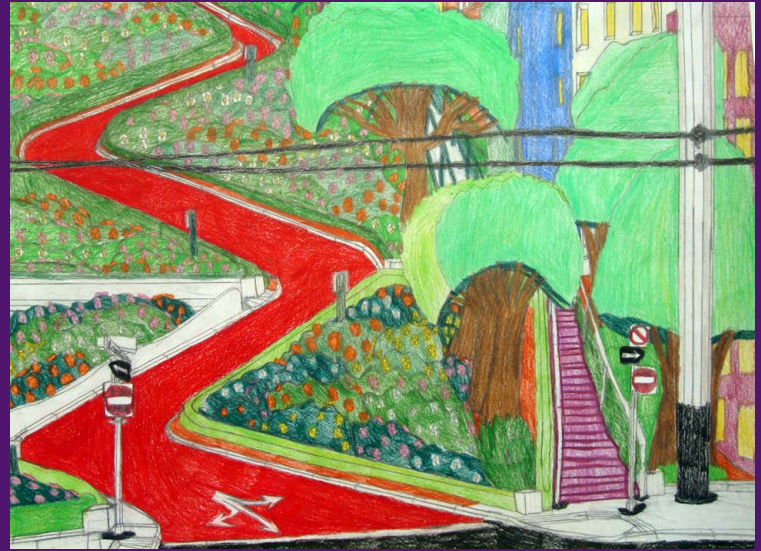
Across the Celtic Sea, our very own Helen Rae continued her meteoric professional rise with her Paris debut at the Outsider Art Fair in October. Her drawings were introduced to a new base of European Collectors and caught the attention of Artnet writer Caroline Elbaor, who wrote, "The fragile nature of the floral elements are tested by the intensity in which Rae executes her drawings, whose subjects seem to be devolving into abstraction." Bravo Helen!

Special thanks to The Good Luck Gallery, Los Angeles for making this opportunity possible.

Celebrate International Success



Joe Zaldivar



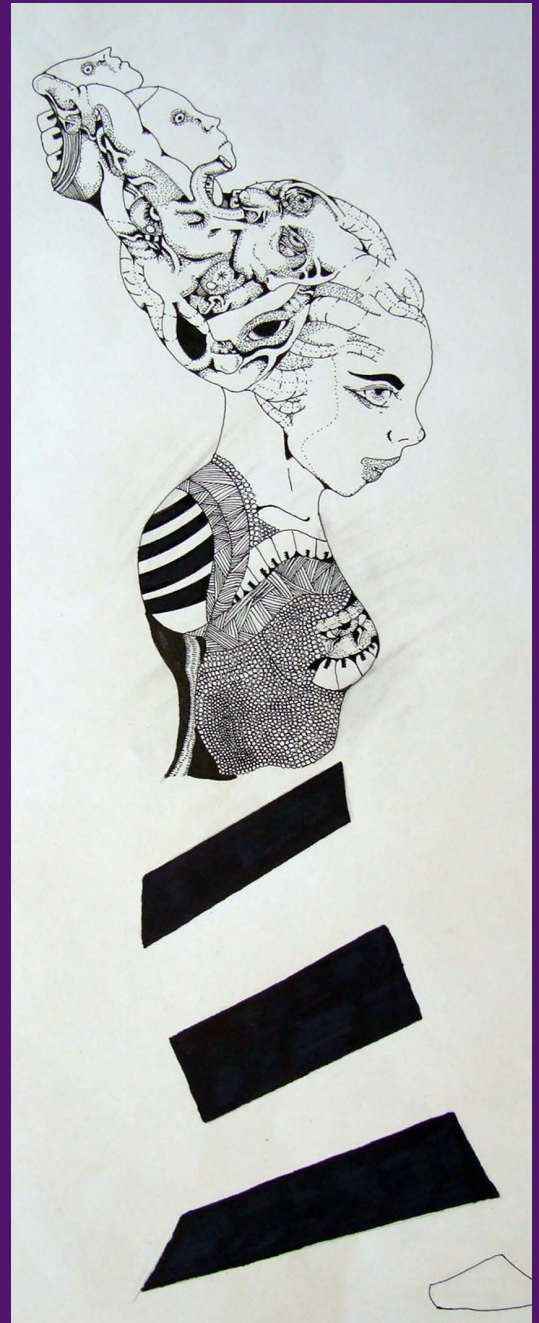
David Romero

The extraordinary thing about art, is that its impact often extends far beyond the artist's own reach. Eight artists of Tierra del Sol recently extended their cultural influence across the Atlantic Ocean, with two exhibitions.

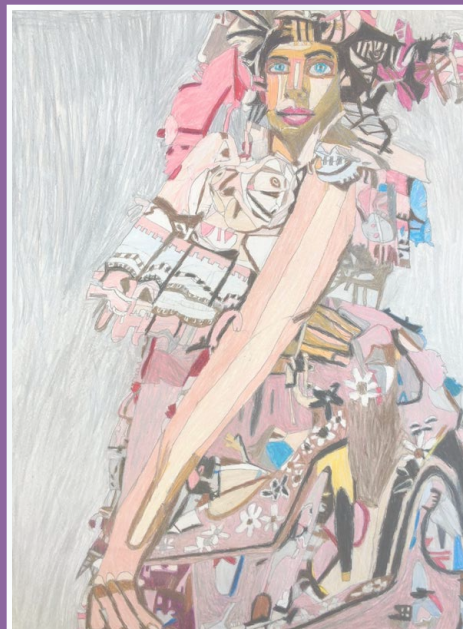
In Cork, Ireland, Perceptions 2016: The Art of Citizenship, an expansive group show, included ten different venues from across the city, and featured artists from progressive art studios across the globe. Congratulations to Sunland Studios and First Street Gallery artists, Evelyn Campos, Gustavo Cruz, Sarit Halo, Trina Kirkman, Daniel Padilla, David Romero and Joe Zaldivar on this outstanding achievement.



Daniel Padilla



Gustavo Cruz



Tierra's NEXUS Students—Makin

Once the Educational phase begins, life after Discovery is rigorous, and ever changing class schedules become a reality. Nina Adel and Grace Hahn are currently living and breathing this experience, as they dedicate their time to focusing on their studies - a concept they were led to believe unattainable, until coming to Tierra.

Meet Nina



When Nina began NEXUS, she recalls her excitement, but admits that college seemed daunting. "I checked out the businesses in the area, but I didn't want to go to the campuses." When asked why she lacked motivation to visit local colleges, Nina shares, "I had spent so many years in high school being known as my sister's 'little sister.' No one even bothered to ask my name, so I said, never again! I also had a high school counselor tell me, 'College might not be a very good option for you, but I can help you get a job in a grocery store.'"

Flash forward to the present day, and we find 27-year old Nina close to obtaining her Bachelor of Science degree in Sociology from CSUN. After graduating from high school a year early, Nina joined NEXUS and earned an A.A. degree at Pierce while interning in the administrative offices at Valley Presbyterian Hospital. These accomplishments prove that Nina's high school career counselor underestimated her abilities



to pursue an education that would lead to a valued career. The harsh reality is that others, like Nina, experience lack of encouragement during their high school years, when it comes to the notion of post-secondary education.

Tierra College to Career Instructor, Karina Tovar, shares, ***"Nina's story is not unusual. She, like others, had many people discourage her from attending college while handing her options to take the easy way out. But, Nina chose to stick with school and is going places. Yes, there have been challenges, but she overcomes them and does not let her disability define her."***

Meet Grace



When Grace Hahn began NEXUS four years ago, she recalls, "I was nervous, and didn't really want to go to college. After high school, I wanted to get a job.

I wasn't motivated to attend college because I wasn't encouraged in high school. However, my mom always encouraged me, and my regional center counselor really pushed me too. I joined NEXUS and did it. My journey was a tough one at first. I started out taking just four units but now I'm taking 13."

Currently recognized on two Dean Honor Rolls, Grace is balancing a full time academic schedule at Los Angeles Mission College, while working as a recreational assistant on campus. "I'm getting straight A's, and playing softball for the Mission College Women's Softball team, too!"

g College to Career a Reality from page 1

Tierra College to Career Instructor, Conrad Ruiz, recalls, "Grace and I started this journey together. My first day as an instructor, I met her while we were touring the Getty. The one trait that I have seen in Grace over the years is motivation. I've witnessed her gradual change to not only have an interest in Child Development, but athletics, as well. She went from watching sports, to playing them."

NEXUS North Valley Client Services Manager, Diala Dennison, adds, "What I've always loved about Grace is her positive attitude... With it, she can accomplish so much, and already has. She convinces me she can do anything, and then does it. It's an excellent trait that I hope Grace never loses sight of."

Meet Rocio



Once students reach the final phase of NEXUS and enter Internship, the personal and academic growth they have gained prepares them for professional acumen. As NEXUS intern, Rocio Gutierrez, organizes the welcome area at the Child Development Institute Learning Center in Canoga Park, she carefully checks the iPads on the main counter, making sure that each one is set to the correct sign-in page. When reflecting on her time in NEXUS, Rocio expresses, "My journey has been so incredible. I never thought I would end up here. It's been three years since I've been in NEXUS, and it has been a wonderful experience."

Like Nina and Grace, when Rocio first began, she admits that she wasn't too keen about going to college. "I was hesitant, because I didn't want to continue going to school. In all honesty, I didn't know what I wanted to do, and never really thought about college. But, when I got more information about NEXUS from Regional Center, I decided it was the right step, so I gave it a try."

After completing Discovery, Rocio was exhilarated. "I saw businesses, visited campuses, and was like 'Wow!!! I can really do this!' I ended up attending Los Angeles Mission College, and got my certification in Computer Applications and Office Technology. It was very challenging, at first. College is tough – really tough, and I had a lot of struggles along the way, but I managed to work hard and get through it."

Tierra Instructor, Felipe Rameriz, recognizes Rocio's hard work as an intern, remarking, "She is very dedicated and willing to overcome barriers. If she has problems, she looks for solutions. Rocio is also good with changing environments without hesitation, and that's a great quality."

For Rocio, the path she made for herself is a promising one. Her academic accolades, vocational experience and bilingual skillset – fluent in both English and Spanish - have shaped her into a desirable candidate for full-time employment. While Rocio always had the ability, the motivation to pursue postsecondary education stemmed from the belief it that was possible.

NEXUS Internship Client Services Manager, Peeriya Supparkpisut, says, **"Clients surprise me every day. Let them do the work, let them try, and they will be okay. Just believe in them. Many will struggle, but we at Tierra support them, and they often surprise themselves."**

Felipe, Nina, Grace, and Rocio are all remarkable individuals who are paving the way for excellence and endless possibilities. When asked what they would say to future NEXUS students, the message from all four participants was the same - *don't be afraid*.

Time and time again, students in Tierra's NEXUS College to Career Program set the bar high for others, regardless of the disability. "Other members of my family attended college but were unable to complete their studies," shares Nina Adel. "I was the first person to earn an A.A. and will soon be the first to graduate from CSUN. I want my mom to see one of her children walk across the stage at CSUN."

She also adds, **"I often tell other NEXUS students, there will be people out there that will say negative things to you, and there may be moments when it seems so hard, you'll think you want to quit. But, don't give up. It will all be worth it, in the end."**



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MAYER • BROWN
PRESENTS

TEE OFF FOR TIERRA

10th Annual Golf Tournament, Auction & Dinner



Los Angeles Daily News



Tierra Family Members — Please Join Us!

Tierra will host special guest speaker:

THOMAS E. POMERANZ, Ed. D.

Dr. Pomeranz is a nationally recognized authority, trainer, clinician and consultant in the field of services for people with disabilities.

Thursday, February 16

Tierra's 1st Street Gallery Art Center
in Claremont
6:00 - 8:00 pm

Thursday, March 16

Tierra's Sunland Campus: Time: TBD
and Tierra's Van Nuys Office: 6:00 - 8:00 pm

Watch your e-mail for details to RSVP.