



Jacob Duran, SVCF YES™ Scholar

## Taking Charge of My Future: Making my Dream to Become a Firefighter a Reality By Jacob Duran

“I have a vision and passion to achieve that vision. A lot of people said and thought I wouldn’t make it, but here I am and I’m thankful to those who believed in me and helped me believe in myself.”

Growing up as a young Hispanic male in an ever-changing world is anything but easy. As far back as I can remember in my childhood, my life was always at a disadvantage. In my life I’ve run into more obstacles than an American Gladiator. I’m so glad I’m still here, alive and well.

I grew up in a household that was as unstable as a 3-legged table. My mom was ill. She was diagnosed with an extreme bipolar illness. She suffered a mental breakdown very early in my life, which took a big toll on me and my family. I know it wasn’t my mom’s fault and I don’t blame her, but I couldn’t help being covered in an overwhelming blanket of fear. My childhood memories are filled with violent verbal arguments between my mom and dad. Soon verbal arguments turned to physical attacks. It was hard dealing with the fact that my mom couldn’t function like the rest of my friends’ moms. At such a young age, it was hard for me to grasp the concept of her mental illness. It created a lot of dysfunction and misunderstanding among the family. It was something we never got use to. My brother and I would sneak out of the house late at night to get away from all the turmoil and stress.

Being in this dysfunctional environment led me to delinquency and alcohol at the young age of 13. By age 17, I was arrested and found myself behind bars. It wasn’t until then that I realized that this wasn’t the life for me. I didn’t want someone telling me what to do all the time. I didn’t like being incarcerated and I didn’t want

to make a jail cell my second home. That’s when I decided that I wanted to go to college and become a firefighter. I wanted a career where I could help people and make a positive contribution to my community. I wanted to be a positive role model to other youth who face their own challenges. I knew I was too smart and too sharp of a man to be dressed in an orange jump suit and put in a box. I decided that I needed to take control of my life and make choices that would help me be proud of who I am. I had a difficult past, but it was time to look to the future.

After my release, I enrolled for classes at Mission Community College in Santa Clara. During my time at Mission, I worked really hard and also acquired my EMT certification. Last December, I graduated with my A.S. degree in Fire Prevention Technology with the help of

the YES™ Scholarship. At the moment I’m looking for a job with an ambulance company to gain experience with patient care and my next big step is to join the South Bay Regional Fire Academy this summer. I plan to attend paramedic school at the beginning of next year.

It’s been a challenge and I still have some way to go, but it’s a blessing that I finally recognized what needed to be done. I have a vision and passion to achieve that vision. A lot of people said and thought I wouldn’t make it, but here I am and I’m thankful to those who believed in me and helped me believe in myself. I finally realized how to live life on my terms. And with the help of organizations like SVCF and the YES™ Scholarship Program, I am 110% positive I will continue my journey not only to become a firefighter, but also to become the best man I can. ✨



From left to right: President Randy Sekany (San Jose Fire Fighters Local 230), Jacob Duran, Captain Jose Guerrero, Fire Engineer Gerry Laird