

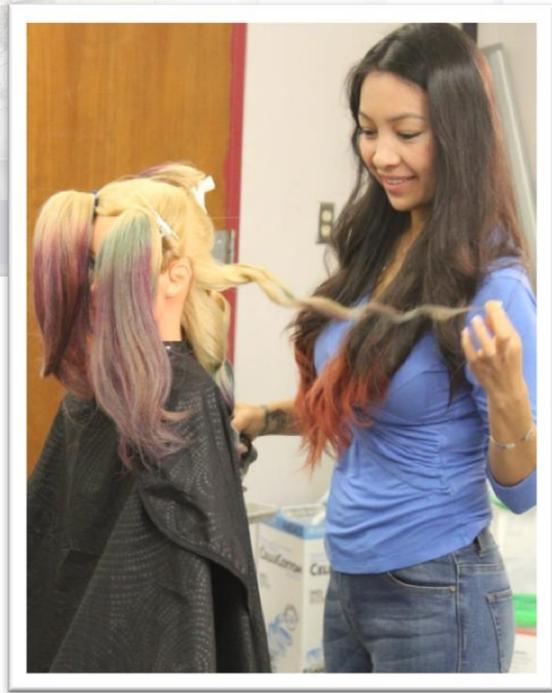
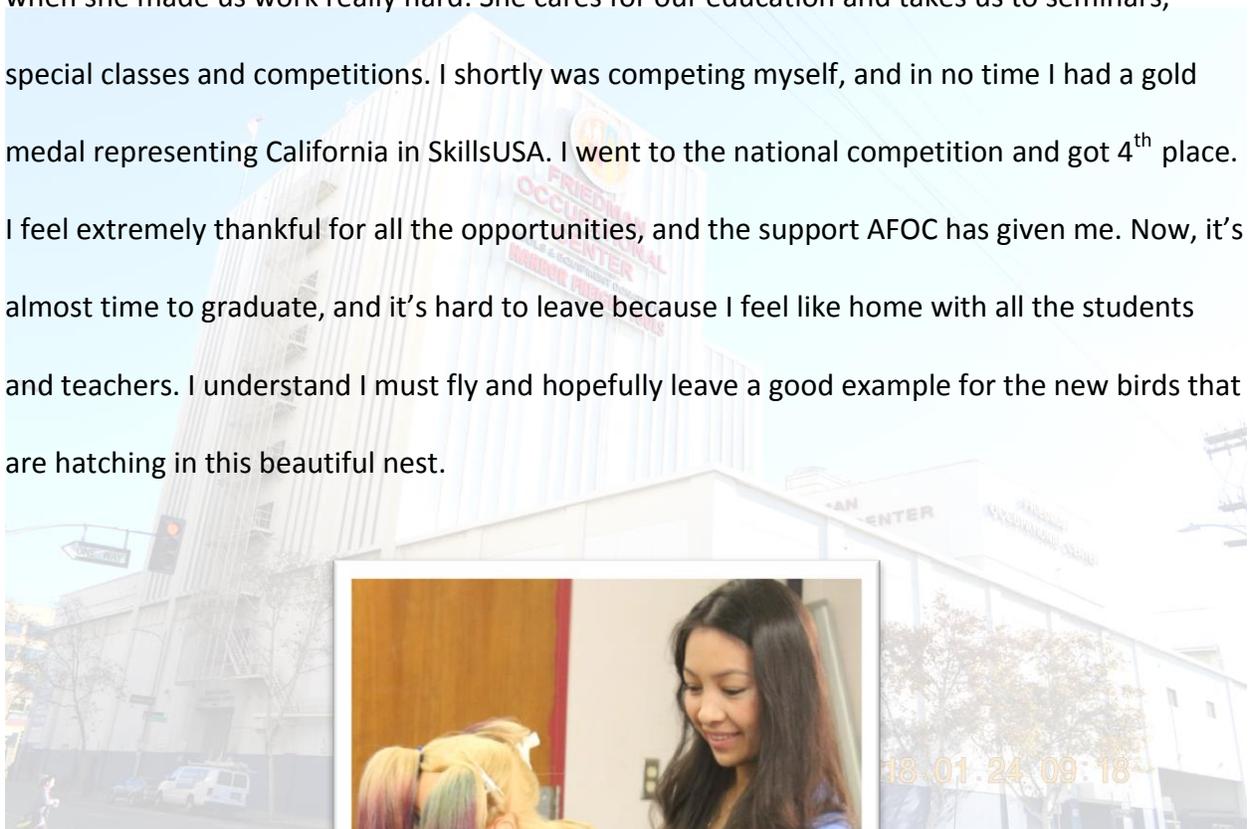
## Voices at AFOC

My name is Ipolita Yecenia Cifuentes de Leon. I arrived to the U.S. when I was 14 years old. I come from a very abusive childhood, escaping from many adversities. Here I got molested by my stepfather, so my mother tried to send me back to my country, but despite everything, I wanted to learn English and be somebody someday. I started working so I could pay rent. I was determined to finish my education. Yes, school was extremely hard because my level of education in my country was so low, but somehow a counselor put me in high school here. Most of the time, I had to translate my homework first then I would do it. I started watching TV in English, and the hardest thing was leaving Spanish music behind. I needed to adapt fast and so I did. I graduated from high school and reached out to colleges, but they just wouldn't help somebody who had no family to back her up. They told me if I wanted to I could, but I had to pay out of my pocket.

I understood, and so I started working three jobs. At some point, I saved money for a career. I applied for a paralegal college, but I found out the school was a scam. I'm glad I escaped from that without a scratch. After searching, I saw a makeup school just a block away from my house, I decided to give it a try. I completed the program on makeup, and three days after, I had my first featured movie. Everything was going smooth, but I wanted to get my cosmetology license. I reached out for schools again, and they all wanted 27k to 30k, and I just couldn't afford it. My eyes got open the day I had an accident, and somebody stole all my kit. I couldn't replace it. Then, I met this girl who had her hair done in pretty colors, so I complemented her and confessed her my love for hair. She told, "My school is not expensive;

you can do payments through the course.” I just couldn’t believe it, so I wanted to find out for myself. The school’s name was Abram Friedman Occupational Center (AFOC). I still couldn’t believe it even after paying for my first course. My brain was like a rainbow of multi colors of happiness.

Finally, I was doing something I wanted to. I met my teacher, and felt in love instantly when she made us work really hard. She cares for our education and takes us to seminars, special classes and competitions. I shortly was competing myself, and in no time I had a gold medal representing California in SkillsUSA. I went to the national competition and got 4<sup>th</sup> place. I feel extremely thankful for all the opportunities, and the support AFOC has given me. Now, it’s almost time to graduate, and it’s hard to leave because I feel like home with all the students and teachers. I understand I must fly and hopefully leave a good example for the new birds that are hatching in this beautiful nest.



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