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Student Spotlight February 2016

Daniel Maldonado

International Christian Academy
Las Vegas, NV



As a single mother on a limited income, Heidi Maldonado works hard to ensure that her son, eight-year-old Daniel, is given the tools to reach his fullest potential in life – including a strong educational foundation. However, living in the state of Nevada – where the education system is ranked last in the nation¹ - Heidi knew early on that not every learning environment is suited for every child and that she must play an active role to ensure that her son does well in school.

Heidi and Daniel's father divorced when Daniel was only two years old. Soon after the divorce, Heidi's mother moved in with Heidi and Daniel, helping to provide a support system and alleviating some of the financial burden. With some of their living expenses offset through this arrangement, Heidi was able to send Daniel to International Christian Academy from preschool until first grade. The school helped to draw out Daniel's natural abilities and he advanced quickly in reading and other areas. However, after Heidi's mother moved out, Heidi could no longer afford the private school tuition and decided to move Daniel to the local public school.

The move to a new school was a hard adjustment on Daniel, as he tried to get used to the different environment, which included a larger class size with less individualized attention. Additionally, Daniel was too advanced for his grade level, and Heidi was disappointed to find out that the second grade class was covering lessons and academic skills that Daniel had already mastered in Kindergarten. To add additional challenges to the situation, the school also mistakenly placed Daniel in an English as a Second Language Program, even though he did not speak Spanish and had a strong skillset in English. In fact, he was already reading on the fourth grade level in second grade, putting him significantly ahead of his other classmates.

No longer being challenged, Daniel soon became bored in class after completing the daily assignments before his other classmates, and the teacher was not able to redesign the lessons to challenge him. He would use his free time to write stories every day – which are now collected in a large folder his mother keeps at home. Heidi was glad to learn her son was so advanced, but worried that without a challenging curriculum to keep him engaged, he would become stagnant or lose interest in school all together. Therefore, Heidi tried to supplement his schoolwork by giving him extra assignments to work on at home. Additionally, knowing that his teacher was already stretched thin with 30 other children and no aide in the classroom, Heidi would take time off from work when she could to come volunteer in his class in an effort to help. However, as time went on, she knew Daniel would need to be in a more challenging environment to help him continue to grow and not lose interest in school.

¹ Kids Count Data Center. (2014). The Annie E. Casey Foundation. <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/>.

When the Nevada Educational Choice Scholarship was created in 2015 and the AAA Scholarship Foundation opened up applications for income-qualified families, Heidi knew she had found her solution and applied for a scholarship for Daniel. Once they were approved to receive the scholarship, she did not hesitate to move him back to International Christian Academy, even though it was already in the middle of the first quarter of the new school year. She knew Daniel's strong abilities as a quick learner – combined with the hands-on staff at International Christian – would enable him to make the transition easily.

Heidi's instincts were correct. After only being back at International Christian Academy for six weeks, Daniel was already excelling in his third grade class. In math, he went from adding double digits to being able to multiply and divide – all in less than two months. He is also continuing to excel in reading and writing. Beyond that, Heidi is most pleased to see Daniel's excitement about learning has returned. As a parent, for Heidi the scholarship has alleviated the financial burden as well as the stress she was experiencing trying to keep her child engaged in learning.

"Knowing that my son is being challenged in school and equipped with the knowledge and skills to reach his full potential gives me a peace of mind," says Heidi. "It has positively impacted our lives at home as well. Rather than worrying about creating separate assignments that will challenge and engage him, I am able to play a supporting role at home, helping to reinforce what is being taught at school and focus on providing for Daniel in other areas of his life. I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the AAA Scholarship Foundation and the generous donors that make this program possible. Thank you!"

About AAA Scholarship Foundation

The typical AAA Scholarship student is an ethnic minority living with a struggling single parent/caregiver in a high crime community. The average household income of families accepted to receive scholarships is \$23,559 for a family of four. Many children are either below grade level, failing at their previous school or both when they receive a scholarship. Parents, who find their children in these circumstances and care about their future, look for viable options. They seek an atmosphere that challenges their child to reverse inadequate learning and/or social patterns and the potential lifelong negative impact. They wish to change their child's learning environment, acquaintances, and the unfortunate predictable outcomes associated with school failure.

AAA Scholarships are funded in Alabama, Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Nevada and Pennsylvania by corporations that redirect a portion of their state tax liability to the AAA Scholarship Foundation in exchange for a tax credit (dollar for dollar in Alabama, Arizona, Florida, Georgia and Nevada, and up to 90 percent in Pennsylvania). The AAA Scholarship Foundation is one of the only approved Scholarship 501(c)(3) Nonprofit Organizations exclusively serving qualifying low-income, disabled and/or displaced students through these Scholarship Tax Credit programs. AAA Scholarship Foundation provides your company with the convenience and efficiency of a single-solution for participating in multiple state tax credit scholarship programs. For more information or to learn how your corporation can participate in the program, visit www.AAAScholarships.org, or contact Kerri Vaughan at kerri@aaascholarships.org or 888 707-2465 ext. 730.



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