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PRESS RELEASE

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Dr. Mona Salomo-Davies Community Child Advocate Addresses Students at Recent Graduation Ceremony

I am honored to have been invited as the keynote speaker for the Insight Schools of California (ISCA) Commencement Celebration held at Pearson Park Amphitheater on June 15th in Anaheim, California. ISCA, a free online public school, serves students in grades 9-12 who are struggling for various reasons, and attending a conventional high school is no longer an option for them. The graduation ceremony celebrated 115 graduates all appreciative to ISCA for the opportunity to earn their high school diploma. It was a wonderful sight to see family and friends cheering on their graduates and showing their support on this momentous occasion.

ISCA had not held an in-person graduation ceremony for the past two years and they understood the importance of finding a keynote speaker from the community who could empathize with the graduates' backgrounds. Not only should the individual inspire the graduates

with their experience and practical next steps, but they would boost their confidence and motivate them towards a successful future. Graduation Coordinator, Ms. Monica Chatfield, first learned about Community Outreach Ministry (COM) on Patch.com upon reading the most recent publishing of our Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) Technology Day Camps. As a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping children whose parents have been incarcerated, Ms. Chatfield “knew she had found the right connection for the Insight graduates.”

I am grateful to Ms. Chatfield for reaching out and providing me with an opportunity to share my own story. I grew up on the South Side of Chicago where gangs, drugs, and crime were the norm. I realized at a young age how the economic disadvantages and lack of educational opportunities led to the prevalence of drugs and alcohol which resulted in crime and incarceration. Immediately following my high school graduation, I had to find work to pay rent, eat, and support myself. The typing and shorthand skills I had acquired while in high school opened the door for me to be hired for an office job. From there I moved up into an awesome career in the Aerospace industry that I loved. Now I am living my dream of helping at-risk kids to break the cycle of incarceration and become first-generation high school graduates, and to connect them to educational and vocational career pathways to earn a respectable salary.

Ahead of the graduation ceremony, I knew in my heart these graduates needed to be strategic with a purpose and a plan to promote themselves the right way during their job search. Therefore, I set up a virtual career meeting to make the graduates aware of internships, apprenticeships, and entry-level employment positions. I also encouraged the students to identify their strengths in technology, visual communications, and digital media so they could have self-assurance during the job-hunting process. Vitaly important, graduates were encouraged to go and meet with a career navigator at their closest Work Force Development office. Just recently,

the Economic Development Coalition has announced a SoCal Initiative featuring youth employment opportunities including internships and training assistance for youth ages 16-24. For more information, visit the EDC website at <https://www.edcswca.com/socal-jobs>.

I felt compelled to share tips with the graduates on how to budget their money, ways to save money, and advice on avoiding credit card debt. And, as the graduates continued in a spirit of celebration, I cautioned them against drinking and driving, and the detrimental effects of drugs like Fentanyl that led to premature deaths.

Students living across California are eligible to enroll at ISCA which is based in Simi Valley. Currently, 50+ ISCA students are living in Riverside County. The diverse student population is primarily low-income (70.6%), and made up of Hispanics (52%), Caucasians (27.5%), and African Americans (14.3%). Some students have special needs (24.3%), and others were homeless (2.4%). To learn more about ISCA, visit <https://insightca.k12.com>.

It has been a pleasure to team with Ms. Monica Chatfield and I look forward to partnering with ISCA and supporting the students in future endeavors! To watch a recap video of the graduation ceremony, visit <https://vimeo.com/728659173>.

Community Outreach Ministry is a volunteer-operated community-based organization (CBO) in Southwest Riverside County serving at-risk kids and families for 22 years through Outreach, Camping, Mentoring, and Christmas Programs. We have already started Christmas in July and are collecting gifts for an estimated 200 local children, ages 1-18, impacted by parental incarceration. The 22nd Annual Angel Tree Christmas Party will be on Sunday, December 11, 2022, at the Elks Lodge #2591 in Wildomar. A drop-off site has been set up at Shear Expressions Hair Salon, 40557 California Oaks Road Suite H2 (next door to Jersey's Pizza), in Murrieta. We

are requesting unwrapped toys for all ages, and hoodies for teens sizes Large, X-Large, and XX-Large. For more details, please contact Denise Ronzello at 951-677-1379.

We welcome sponsors to join our cause of *giving at-risk kids a second chance to be winners and champions*. To donate visit us at <https://www.communityoutreachministry.org> and scan the QR code or text DONATE CHAMPIONS to 609-212-0627. Checks may also be made payable to Community Outreach Ministry and mailed to 23905 Clinton Keith Road Suite 114 #116, Wildomar, CA. 92595. You may also contact us at info@communityoutreachministry.org or call 951-698-7650.