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PRESS RELEASE

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Photos: Courtesy of Community Outreach Ministry

October 15, 2022

My Story: How Community Outreach Ministry Has Impacted My Life

By: Elijah O'Leary

The following is a story written by a Community Outreach Ministry youth in his own words.

“I dreamed of growing up in a nice home with two loving parents. Unfortunately, my “normal” was quite different. My mother abandoned me when I was two, and later she ended up in prison. My father’s different girlfriends mistreated me, and they spent all our money on drugs. I grew up in an environment where drugs, alcohol, violence, crime, homelessness, and neglect were the norm.

At age six, my 11-year-old brother and I would sell water near the football stadium on hot days to make money to buy ourselves food. We didn't have much at Christmas, but I would get a gift from my mother via Angel Tree every year. I had no memory of her, but it felt good to know she still cared. I lived in a van with two adults and six children for a year. I didn't go to school for three years. When I was on my own and homeless, my Great-Aunt picked me up and took me to California. At that time, I felt alone and hopeless. By age 14, I had severe dyslexia and couldn't read or spell. My teachers and counselors told me I would never be able to get a high school diploma.

In California, I read an article about Community Outreach Ministry, so I contacted them. Dr. Mona Salomo-Davies responded to me and invited me to their Angel Tree Christmas Party. While I was looking to help them, the opposite happened. Community Outreach Ministry helped me in more ways than I could imagine. They made me feel special, loved, and like I was a part of a family. I always believed it was good to give to others, which made me realize I wasn't alone and could help others in similar situations.

While I got gifts from my mother via their Angel Tree Christmas Party, Community Outreach Ministry changed my life in many ways. They realized that underneath my severe dyslexia, I was smart, and they continued to encourage me in academics, something no one had ever done.

Dr. Mona wrote a letter of recommendation on my behalf to Give Back and I was accepted into their mentoring and scholarships programs. Give Back has helped me with every part of my academic life and future planning. I am now a high school junior with a 4.02 grade point average (GPA) and a 4-year complete scholarship to college. I received an A in my first college course and two photography internships, and I am improving my skills in photography.

Also, when Dr. Mona and Coach Bob put on Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) robotics presentations, they allow me to help with robotics.

Community Outreach Ministry did more than give me a Christmas gift – they have given me hope to envision a bright future and helped give me the tools to make that vision a reality. I am so thankful I saw that article in the paper and contacted the organization. My life is different now. In June 2024, I will be able to graduate from high school because of various organizations like Community Outreach Ministry, Angel Tree, Give Back, and the counselors at Tahquitz High School in Hemet. After graduation, I plan to attend college.”

Community Outreach Ministry is celebrating the 22nd Annual Angel Tree Christmas Party and invites you to visit our Christmas landing page to learn about ways to get involved and give struggling children and youth hope for the future!

<https://communityoutreachministry.org/christmas2022/>

Consider becoming a gift collection site, provide unwrapped hoodies in sizes L, XL, and XXL for our teens, or become an event sponsor for \$1000.00 or \$500.00. You can reach us at the office (951)698-7650, by mobile (951)231-5515, or by email at info@communityoutreachministry.org.