



Phoenix

CHARTER ACADEMY
CHELSEA

Class of 2018

Daniela Alejandra Medina
Age 25 from Siguatepeque, Honduras

“A woman does not need a man by her side to survive. If I can raise three children on my own, I know I can graduate and so you can too.”

The road to graduation for Daniela Medina has not been easy, but the lessons she learned and people she met along the way have made it worth it. Daniela was born in Honduras and grew up there as one of seven children. She describes her childhood as fun, but difficult. Her father passed away when she was young, making it hard on her mother and siblings. They often had to work selling fruit and picking coffee beans to help support each other. She loved school, though, and often earned high grades on all her work and exams.

These challenges are what led her to ultimately immigrate to the United States and reunite with two of her sisters. Before attending Phoenix, Daniela spent a year at East Boston High School but wanted to find somewhere that would help her be on the right path. In 2014, her friend, Edwin Martinez (Class of 2017), recommended Phoenix as a place that would help her get a diploma and support her children. Starting at Phoenix was not easy for Daniela. Even though she had lived in the US for a few years, she did not know a lot of English. She had two young children she needed to support by working overnight while still coming to school everyday. Little by little, things got easier as Daniela received more help from Phoenix staff members.

Attending Phoenix has helped Daniela overcome many challenges and ultimately be able to make better decisions. She is thankful for many people who helped her along the way. Notably, the CDC staff including Ms. Catie and Ms. Alex helped her care for her children and maintain her attendance. Outside of school, Daniela knows that she would not be approaching graduation without the support of her sisters, Nivian, Mariela, and Iris. They all support her and her children.

Now, a mother of three, Daniela is ready for the future. She wants to attend college, study technology, and one day become a software developer. Her hope is to use her diploma to make a better life for herself and her children. Her advice for Phoenix students is: “If I can graduate with three children, working, and running a house, you can do it. It is difficult, but is not impossible. If you need help, look to your teachers and friends.”



Dejalei Goncalves
Age 18 from Boston, MA

Phoenix

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Class of 2018

"I am not perfect, but know that I'm working. I'm paving the way and I'm reaching my purpose."

Dejalei Goncalves was born in Brockton, MA, and lives with her mother and younger brother. As a brilliant, vibrant, and determined young woman, Dejalei has always exhibited great resilience when faced with many obstacles of life.

Attending middle school at the Lila G. Frederick school in Dorchester, MA, Dejalei envisioned attending a high school that prepared her for college and a career. After being accepted to Cristo Rey Boston, Dejalei tried her hardest to enthrall herself within their community, but something was not right. One of Dejalei's closest friends, Treanalise Sosa, introduced her to Phoenix, which Treanalise was researching herself. Phoenix embodied exactly what Dejalei dreamed of in a high school and she later decided to transfer. Upon arriving at Phoenix, Dejalei found that she would now be engulfed in another world. Phoenix was a completely different world where she would be held to high expectations. Ms. Michael, an AmeriCorps fellow, worked closely with Dejalei when she struggled in class teaching her far more than academics; Ms. Michael taught her what it meant to a woman with grit and determination.

As an adamant part of Scholar Government, Dejalei used her strong presence and voice to collaborate with her peers around important matters that needed to be addressed among the school community. Helping plan events that would enhance her peers' school pride and experience was very important to Dejalei and showed just how devoted she was to PCA. Dejalei also kept herself active playing both Girls Basketball and Girls Soccer alongside her friends.

Her deep connection with God and her spirituality is the driving force behind all that Dejalei desires and completes. The perseverance that Dejalei has shown over the course of her high school career speaks volumes to her self-confidence and her belief that she can do all things through Christ. The success that Dejalei has exhibited thus far she attributes to the love and nurture that God shows her every day.

As she prepares to leave Phoenix, Dejalei will be attending Eastern Nazarene College in Quincy, Massachusetts. Phoenix has taught Dejalei many lessons over the years, but she takes away one important lesson that she hopes to share with the PCA graduate classes to come, "NEVER be afraid to stand out!"



Stephen Connor, Jr.
Age 19 from Boston, MA



Class of 2018

"They can try to hold me back, but this education pushes me forward."

Stephen Conner, known to family and friends as Stevie, was born and raised in Dorchester, MA. He grew up with his mom, his two older brothers, and his younger brother and sister.

In elementary and middle school, Stevie attended Neighborhood House Charter School in Dorchester. "I was a troublemaker," he admits, "but school was fun." However, after incurring too many suspensions in a year, Stevie moved to McCormack Middle School in Dorchester. "The McCormack was tough" he recounts. "I went from being in a peaceful school to a hostile place. It was tough because in my old school I knew everybody." Knowing that he did not want to stay in BPS for high school, Stevie and his family began researching his charter options. Phoenix was always a frontrunner, due to Stevie's family connection- his brother Donnell graduated from Phoenix in 2013, and his other brother Deondre was also attending the school.

"When I first came to Phoenix, it was different" Stevie says. "It was so small. So much going on in such a little place" Stevie felt immediately comfortable because Deondre also attended the school. However, he struggled with meeting the expectations he felt were already set for him because of Donnell's performance. Due to this pressure, Stevie struggled with self regulation during his early years at Phoenix. "My biggest challenge was facing myself," he says. "I had to learn that sometimes the problem wasn't teachers, it was me." As he strengthened his self-awareness and self-control, Stevie began to build an incredible support network of peers and Phoenix staff.

Stevie credits a lot of his success to this support network- particularly his tutor Ms. Levario, his biology teacher Ms. JP, and his teachers senior year, Mr. Bensko, Ms. Gupta, and Ms. Preiss, as well as his strong group of friends- particularly Dana, Joseph, and Malik. With these supports, as well as his improved senses of resiliency and impulse control, Stevie made it to senior year and graduation.

After graduation, which he calls his "greatest accomplishment," Stevie is taking a year off from school to figure out exactly what he wants to do in his future, as well as to earn money for college. Right now, he's thinking about a career in art or architecture- two fields that allow him to use his incredible artistic talent. "I want to be really successful in life," Stevie says. "I never want to have to struggle again."



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Class of 2018

Franklin Alexander Merino Portillo
Age 22 from San Vicente, El Salvador

“Never give up. Great things take time. It doesn’t matter if you have plans, you have to breathe and then go.”

As he prepares to graduate, Franklin remembers all of the pain and struggle that got him to this point. Growing up in El Salvador, Franklin looked up to his father as a role model. But, when Franklin was young, his father left the family to immigrate to the United States. Franklin then turned to one of his older brothers, but he, too, ended up leaving. Left alone with his mother and other siblings, Franklin had to navigate his childhood relatively alone. Working hard to provide for him and his siblings, Franklin’s mother became his sole role model and the rock he needed in his life.

When Franklin was young, he loved attending school. His favorite subject, English, allowed him to pursue his passion for reading and writing. But one day, he raced home from school to find that his family was being extorted by gang members. At 17, Franklin and his family had to pack up their belongings and head to the U.S., leaving home, family, and friends behind. He was first sent to Miami, and then made his way to Boston. There, Franklin applied to Chelsea High but was told he was too old to attend. His lawyer told him about Phoenix, where older students were welcomed. Franklin wasn’t sold on the idea at first, but when he talked to his cousin Walter Paiz, who was already attending Phoenix, he came around and started on his path towards a high school diploma. Franklin remembers his first week at Phoenix as being one of the most difficult things he has experienced. Everyone was speaking English and he didn’t understand a word anyone said. Each day he would leave school feeling frustrated that he didn’t learn anything. After the first couple of weeks, Franklin was ready to quit and drop out. He credits his mother and Walter as the reasons that he is still here today. They convinced him to never give up and that things would get better, that “you have to do this to have a better future.”

As Franklin continued at Phoenix, he also had to work to help support his family. He often worked overnights and then came straight to school. However, he did not let this hinder his progress. His teachers, especially Ms. Fiore, Mr. Bensko and Ms. Henning, supported him and pushed him to do his best and work hard. In the future, Franklin will attend Bunker Hill Community College and pursue a career as an electrician or carpenter. He eventually wants to return to El Salvador and other parts of Central America to create programs that help the poor gain better access to resources.



Wendy Esmeralda Franco Melara

Age 22 from La Reina
Chalatenango, El Salvador

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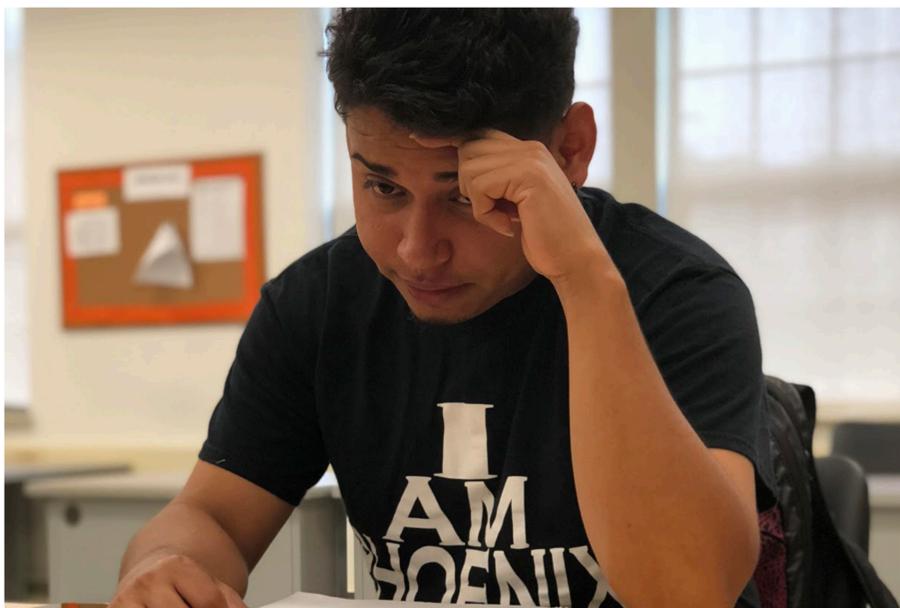
“Working hard is important, but there is something that matters even more....believing in yourself.”

Throughout her time at Phoenix, Wendy has learned to appreciate what she has in life and to always try to be a better person. After living without her parents for over ten years, she moved to the United States in 2014. She describes her childhood as difficult because her dad left for the U.S. when she was four and her mom also left when she was eight. Her life changed when she immigrated to the U.S. herself, reunited with her family, and started school at Phoenix.

When she first started at Phoenix, Wendy found everything about school difficult. She did not know English or have any friends, and everything was different than what she expected. This did not last long or stop her from being successful. After a few months of school, Wendy found her best friend, Lily Flores Portillo. Wendy and Lily grew up together in La Reina Chalatenango, El Salvador, but were separated for many years before finding each other again at Phoenix. They quickly bonded and have been there for each other since.

Wendy says her greatest accomplishment is reaching graduation because she always thought she would not be able to do it, but by passing classes and reaching her goal, she now knows everything is possible. There are many people who helped her be able to do this. At school, she says her teachers including Ms. Fiore and Ms. Weislow were able to push her to do things she did not want to do and help her when things got difficult. Outside of school, her parents have always been her biggest support. They have taught her many lessons and made it possible for her to go to school by providing everything she needed to come everyday. Her sister has also always been there for her and has helped a lot.

In the future, Wendy hopes to be a special education teacher so she can help take care of children who need support. She wants all future Phoenix students to know that they should never give up, no matter how difficult it is. Wendy came to Phoenix shy, but leaves as someone who will always speak her mind and do what is best for herself and those around her.



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“Everything you’ve ever wanted is on the other side of fear.”

Rodolfo Carrillo Sibrian

Age 23 from La Paz, El Salvador

Rodolfo lives by the mantra, “When I start something, I like to finish it. I’m not someone who will leave it in the middle.” This idea pushed him through four years at Phoenix and is why he will be graduating with a high school diploma and many opportunities for the future. Graduating from a U.S. high school was not always what Rodolfo had in mind for his future, though. He had an amazing childhood in El Salvador, living with his grandmother while his mom worked in the States to provide for them. He spent his time playing with friends and studying instead of worrying about bills like he does now. That changed in 2014, when, due to the rising violence and negative influences from gangs, his mom called and said he was leaving for the U.S. the next day. Rodolfo left to protect himself and his family, especially his grandmother. He did not want her to experience the pain of losing someone she loved.

Despite the challenges of immigrating, Rodolfo does not regret his decision. Since coming to Chelsea, he’s been blessed with many opportunities including his education, his job, and meeting many great people both in and out of school. In addition to his family, his friends and teachers have been huge supports for his success. Without staff members like Mrs. Arroyo, Ms. Fiore, and Ms. Marrero, Rodolfo would have dropped out years ago. However, he was able to discuss his challenges and feelings about not wanting to come to school and, in his words, “talking with them made it seem like it was possible”. Like many scholars starting at Phoenix, Rodolfo’s two biggest challenges were learning English as an older student and working long hours while coming to school. These challenges did not stop him, but instead made him believe that all the hard work was going to be worth it in the end. He advises current students to never give up and to listen to what teachers say, even though it can be really annoying. He’s learned and wants others to realize that they have gotten too far to give up—everyday they are one step closer to graduation and even though it is hard, everything pays off in the end.

After graduation, Rodolfo plans to work for a year to save up money to take classes at Bunker Hill Community College. He would like to be an architect or have his own business. No matter what he ends up doing, Rodolfo is a true testament to the power of education and hard work. He says, “Education is something that no one can take away from you,” which is why, no matter what path he takes, Rodolfo will be successful.



Ashley Milonopoulos
Age 19 from Revere, MA



Class of 2018

“Get your education, don’t forget where you came from, and the world is going to know your name.”

Want some proof that Phoenix continues *#ProvingIt’sPossible*? Just walk up the main staircase on campus and you’ll see Class of 2018 graduate Ashley Milonopoulos beaming at you from a whole bulletin board full of pictures taken of her with acceptance letters to colleges around the state. This girl is going places! As a 19-year-old leaving high school with the world as her oyster, Ashley remembers that it hadn’t always seemed possible. While she’d always been a good student, she’d never really thought seriously about attending college or devoting herself to a career.

Growing up in Revere, Ashley was raised by her grandmother from the age of six. While she did her work, she also got in trouble...a lot. In elementary and middle school, Ashley was suspended several times, and was finally expelled from Weymouth High at the start of her sophomore year. She realized she had fallen in with some bad influences and needed a fresh start in a fresh environment. Luckily, an aunt that works with youth suggested Phoenix as a place where Ashley could re-engage. While it wasn’t easy to transition back into school and start making new friends, Ashley persevered. Even when times got tough during her junior year and she missed a lot of school due to her job and other responsibilities, Ashley stuck with it.

Ashley has a lot to be proud of from her time at Phoenix. She was elected captain of the girls’ basketball team, got accepted to several colleges, and won prestigious scholarships like the Christian A. Herter scholarship, which will cover her first two years of college. Ashley credits Phoenix with helping her see such things as a possibility, especially teachers Mr. Bensko and Mr. Lazar, Principal Dean, and Treanalise, a close friend who Ashley met during her first year at Phoenix. At home, Ashley’s grandma was a constant and loving supporter who pushed Ashley to focus on doing her best.

As Ashley moves on to a pre-med program at Regis College with hopes of becoming a pediatric surgeon, she leaves her younger classmates and aspiring Phoenix graduates with some words of encouragement. “Challenge yourself. Take the opportunities that are presented to you, like dual enrollment and MCAS tutoring, that other high schools don’t offer. It’s important to take advantage of these!” As a testament to what can happen when you give your all in pursuit of an education, her classmates would do well to take Ashley’s advice.



Jonathan “J’More” Morency
Age 18 from Everett, MA

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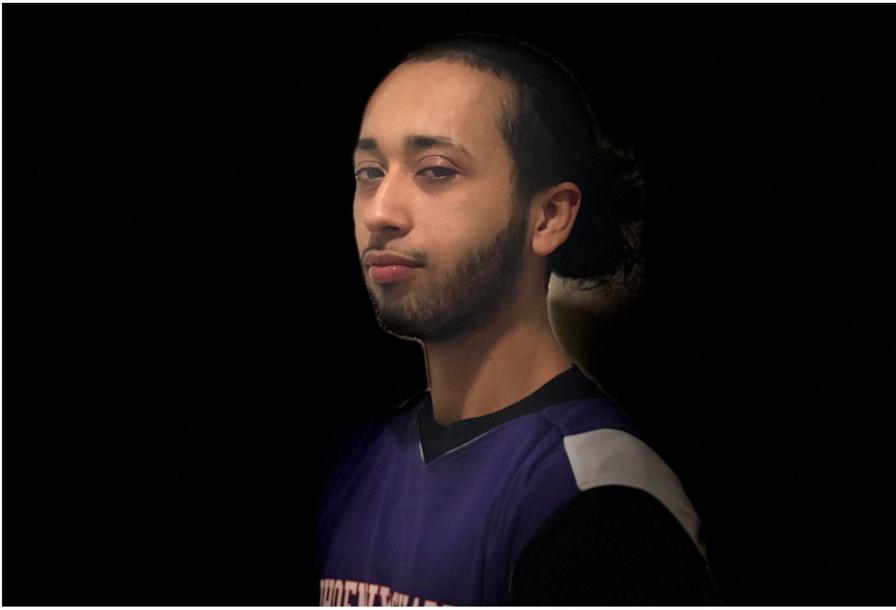
“Why walk through doors, when you can dance through them?”

In his childhood, Jonathan Morency lived in Saugus with his parents, siblings, aunts, and cousins. Later, Jonathan moved with his parents and sister to Malden, MA. His favorite shows growing up were Fresh Prince, Rocket Power, and The Proud Family, and he used to want to be a basketball player but thought it “wasn’t going to work out because I wasn’t tall enough.” He went to a few schools before attending middle school and his first year of high school at Pioneer Charter School before coming to Phoenix. He says, “I was a smart kid but didn’t try. I knew the work but didn’t do it in middle school.”

After being told he would have to repeat 9th grade, Jonathan came to Phoenix to continue school without getting set back. He liked that at the new school he was able to work at his own pace. Throughout his time at Phoenix he feels that he has maintained the same focused mindset to graduate and the concept of doing things for yourself. He also credits his time at Phoenix for making him “more of a smart Alec”. Proving this, Jonathan has proven this by getting advanced on all of his MCAS tests, getting accepted to universities, and attending a bio statistic leadership conference at Harvard. He was even invited to do a computer science course with Google.

Jonathan would like to thank his mom for putting him from school. He says “She came down all the way from Philly to enroll me at Phoenix so I wouldn’t get held back at my other school.”. He would also like to thank Mr. Dean for helping him with his credits to graduate and Mr. Mitchell for giving him good advice on the track to graduation. His advice for other students and rising seniors is “This is not a normal school, come here and do your work. If you’re going to come here and goof off you’re going to be here forever.”

Next year Jonathan will be attending Drexel University, studying Computer Science with a minor in interactive media technology. He also plans on continuing to work on his youtube channel, and finishing a Google computer science course. In the future, he wants to work for a top technology company and continue dancing. He hopes to travel all over, with the first stop being Tokyo, the “home country of anime.” His final thoughts are: “Keep that positive energy, that’s what I like to bring-- positivity”.



Jonathan "JV" Valdez
Age 22 from Chelsea, MA

Phoenix

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Class of 2018

"When we tackle obstacles, we find hidden reserves of courage and resilience we did not know we had. And it is only when we are faced with failure, challenges, and people that disrupt your path, that we realize that these resources were always there within us. We just have to find it within ourselves."

When you hear the name Jonathan Valdez one word comes to mind - RESILIENCE. At a young age, JV experienced some life situations that made growing up and having a "normal" childhood difficult. He bounced around a lot, living in many different cities, with different people and countless shelters. This lifestyle made it extremely tough for JV to make positive decisions when it came to his education. At the young age of 14, he became the man of the house and essentially quit school to take care of his younger siblings. He would stay home all day and take care of his younger brother and sister, and then head out at night to earn some money. In 2007, his family was really struggling. His sister was having a lot of personal problems and she was taken away from the family. That same year, JV learned that his father was sick and there wasn't much else doctors could do. When JV learned that his father had passed away, he felt completely hopeless about life and got heavily involved in the street life.

After four years of being out of school, he learned about Phoenix from a friend and former classmate. He reflected on his life and thought "I want to be better, I want something more for myself." That's when he decided to enroll in Phoenix. He knew when he walked in that door that he was here for one reason - and that was to earn a diploma and change his life. One way Phoenix has changed JV is by developing a growth mindset and realizing that when things are bad it's not the end. He knows that there is hope in everything - and with the amount of setbacks JV has experienced in his time at Phoenix, he knows that he will always rise above. He is moving on from Phoenix accomplishing many goals, but one that sticks out is earning honor roll - he says, "I waited four years for that!"

Next year JV plans to attend Bunker Hill Community College to study Criminal Justice and Sports Management. He will also join the men's basketball team with a new goal of playing overseas.



Josh "Polo" Burrell-Thompson
Age 19 from Boston, MA

Phoenix

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Class of 2018

"When a defining moment comes along, you can do one of two things: define the moment, or let the moment define you!"

Josh "Polo" has had a pretty difficult and precarious educational past that included getting expelled from his elementary school in the second grade. After repeating 7th grade twice, and finishing 8th grade, he was ready for a more stable education. He heard about Phoenix from his middle school guidance counselor at Dorchester Collegiate, and that's when Josh joined Phoenix in 2014.

Josh was never a fan of school. "I hated abiding by all the rules and regulations," he says. He found certain rules at Phoenix particularly hard, like dress code and getting his phone taken away, but he enjoyed many aspects of Phoenix and says he liked the teachers and the way they supported him by getting him food. He states, "When I first came to Phoenix, I had my guard up and I wasn't very trusting of people. I knew no one." He remembers feeling like no one would understand him or relate to him and, for those reasons, he didn't want to build relationships with anyone.

Josh knew deep down that he always had wisdom to share with teachers and peers, but never knew how to articulate his words. Over time he changed and learned how to interact with peers and teachers to be able to form solid relationships. "I stopped feeling like people who didn't know me weren't good enough to get to know me." He credits Phoenix for that change and for that, he reaps the best benefit of all: long-lasting, genuine relationships and a support system that he knows will have his back after he moves on from Phoenix.

His advice to Phoenix scholars and future seniors is to get things done when they need to be done, saying that "it will be easier for you to do what you need to do when you have to do it." In further reflection, Josh's states that "YOU being the reason you aren't where you want to be in life is the worst feeling in the world." After graduation, Josh is going to take some time to really think about what he wants to pursue next. He has a passion for working with children and hopes to someday work directly with them to teach them to walk their own path, and not be followers. In the meantime, his next goal is to get a job working at Ralph Lauren.



Lily Flores

Age 23 from La Reina
Chalatenango, El Salvador

Phoenix

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*“Take pride in how far you’ve come.
Have faith in how far you can go, but
don’t forget where you came from.”*

Lily was born in La Reina Chalatenango in El Salvador, a place that many other Phoenix scholars call “home.” According to Lily, La Reina is a small place where everyone knows each other - quite like her second “home” at Phoenix! Lily reluctantly left La Reina in 2014 while she was pursuing a degree in Accounting at Universidad Monsenor Oscar Arnulfo Romero. She left because her life circumstances became too dangerous. It was a very hard decision for her and her family but she decided to make the journey alone and join her father and brother in Everett, MA.

Upon arrival in the U.S., she immediately felt like she did not belong. She did not speak English well yet. However, she felt welcomed at Phoenix and remembers teachers being very patient, kind, and accepting. During her first two years, Lily had nearly perfect attendance. She studied hard, stayed focused, and built a support system of friends and teachers. Over the years, Lily has needed to balance work, school, and family in ways that have challenged her ability to bring all the energy and focus to her studies that she would like. With a resolute focus on graduation, she proved it possible and is excited to graduate this year. “There was a teacher, Ms. Fiore, that I thought really hated me at the beginning. Now, I realize that she really cares for me - she wanted me to be on the right path. She is one of the best teachers here.” With great support and hard work, Lily earned Proficient on all three of her MCAS exams and reflects with pride on overcoming this challenge last year. One of the most exciting and challenging learning experiences was the “StatStart” program that Lily completed in the summer of 2015 at the Harvard School of Public Health. Lily enjoyed applying her Math skills to real-world situations and real-world problems, something she hopes to continue to do after Phoenix.

Lily will attend Bunker Hill Community College next year before transferring to UMass Boston to become a neonatal nurse. She has chosen this career because of her deep love of kids. Lily knows that if she does what she really wants to do and follows her passion, she will never work a day in her life. Lily faces the future with resolve, pride, and hope. She recommends to all Phoenix scholars and people who’ve faced challenges in their lives to “Never give up and never forget where you came from.”



Treanalise Sosa
Age 18 from Lynn, MA



Class of 2018

*“Open your eyes, it’s all a disguise,
the fear that you feel is not real.”*

Treanalise learned about Phoenix from her sister’s friend Shampell (Phoenix Graduate, 2012). She decided to enroll and make the commute from Boston, taking 2 buses and 2 trains to get to Phoenix every day, relying on her focus and resilience each step of the way. Though she was “turned away” her second day, two staff members showed up at her door to bring her, and other scholars, to school. It was then she realized Phoenix was a good fit for her, as Treanalise thrives on strong, lasting relationships. Though she did not know many scholars when she began at Phoenix, she eventually made friends while starting a trend of academic excellence that she has carried through her career at Phoenix - earning High Honor Roll every quarter. Never settling for academic excellence alone, Treanalise served in many leadership roles including being Student Government President for two years. She also seized opportunities to begin her college career while at Phoenix, and earned the most college credits of any Phoenix scholar, ever, taking 5 classes at Bunker Hill Community College.

Treanalise so enjoyed her experience at Phoenix that she recruited a number of her friends to attend, who have also found success here. They all joined the basketball team under Mr. Chen’s persistent encouragement and became true scholar-athletes for the first time in their lives, bonding in ways that would have been difficult in a larger school environment. Through her time at Phoenix, Treanalise feels that she has become an even stronger, more empowered woman. “I became more expressive, more confident, and built good, lifelong relationships with people. Phoenix made me feel like people really cared about me - people looked out for me. If I was having a bad day, people would come up to me and ask if I was ok. At other schools, you could walk through the halls and feel like a ghost. Many Phoenix members made me feel noticed.”

After Phoenix, Treanalise will be attending Merrimack College on a full scholarship, majoring in Secondary Education and English Literature. She has set her immediate sights on being a high school English teacher, but is not stopping there. From there, she plans on leading schools, organizations, and policy development to ensure that all have access to high quality education opportunities. Overall, she hopes to inspire women of color to pursue their goals and leave their mark - as she surely will!



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Williams A. Mejia Alay
Age 18 from Chelsea, MA

“There’s always going to be a bumpy road, but that should never stop you from reaching your destination.”

When reflecting on his childhood, Williams was surrounded by the love and support of his mother, father, and two sisters who also attended Phoenix. Williams didn’t grow up with a lot of money. He grew up in the projects, but one thing he learned with the support of his family is that “it doesn’t matter where you come from, it only matters the outcome.” This is now his personal mantra.

Growing up, Williams’ parents were really strict which helped him to be safe so that he was protected from drugs and death. His parents put him on the path of God by going to church everyday which helped him to remain focused. So, God was also Williams’ support system.

Williams also had an outlet with his friends and developed a love for basketball from an early age. He says, “All the problems in the world always went away when I got either go outside with my friends Jonathan and Derrick G., or when I got to spend time with my family. My friends didn’t grow up with each other, but I grew up with them both. I always felt connected to somebody.”

Williams says his challenges with school began in middle school when he was bullied for his size and the way he dressed. Phoenix is the place where Williams could start over and disassociate himself with all of his middle school problems and his peers who were negative influences on his life.

In order to overcome his middle school obstacles, Williams has earned honor roll and high honor roll, has participated in community service, served as the captain of the basketball team for 3 years, and organized school-wide basketball tournaments between students and staff members.

Williams has some advice for upcoming scholars, “Don’t give up, because there is always someone there even if you don’t feel like there is.” He is excited to start Bunker Hill Community College in the fall, where he will study sports management and will continue to play basketball.



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Harold Garcia

Age 18 from San Martín, El Salvador

“Many of life’s failures are experienced by people who did not realize how close they were to success when they gave up.” - Thomas Edison

Harold is one of many students who found himself at Phoenix after immigrating to the United States from El Salvador in 2014. Harold describes his childhood in El Salvador as great. He spent his time running, playing soccer, and climbing trees with his friends. He lived without the worries of being a grown up. This changed when, like many other Salvadorians, threats from gangs led his family to decide to move somewhere new.

When Harold first started at Phoenix, he felt everything was difficult because of the language barrier. Many students and teachers spoke in English, so it was hard to communicate if they did not speak Spanish. He gained more confidence once he started studying in Ms. Weislow’s class and met his best friends: Lily and Madelin. Their friendship helped Harold become more confident and able to face challenges in his classes. He attributes his success at Phoenix to his friendships with them. Every time he was distracted in class, Lily was there to help him focus. When he had questions, Madelin gave him guidance. Harold also believes each of his teachers had an important place in his journey. He admired their ability to be happy and support students even after a student gets angry with them.

Harold experienced great success as a scholar athlete at Phoenix both in soccer and in track. As a soccer player, he was part of the first Phoenix team to make it to the playoffs in 2015. As a runner in track, he often won first and second place medals. His time competing in sports taught him to challenge himself and always try to do better. This determination shows in his English learning growth. After knowing very little when he began, Harold can now communicate completely in English. He is happy to be able to talk with other people in English because it was something he always wanted to do.

After Phoenix, Harold wishes to attend college and eventually become a veterinarian. Since he was a child, he has been passionate about taking care of animals and, even though it requires 4-8 more years of school, he is determined to achieve his goal. His advice to current Phoenix students is, “If you have a question, ask it. You might get the same work in the future, and since you didn’t ask before, you’re not going to be able to do it until you ask.”



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“When things become hard, perseverance is what will help you to overcome the obstacles.”

Karla Huezo

Age 24 from Metapán, El Salvador

Karla Huezo was born in Metapán, El Salvador. She lived with her grandmother. As the oldest child, she had plenty of responsibilities. The closest high school was an hour away, so she only went to school for four hours each Saturday. The classes were really fast and she had to do a lot of studying on her own during the week.

During her last year in high school, she decided to move to the United States to meet her parents. After being reunited, she wanted to study, but at 20 years old, other high schools didn't accept her due to her age. Then, a friend told her about Phoenix and she was really excited to enroll.

The biggest challenge when she started Phoenix was learning English. She didn't understand anything at first. It was very difficult to communicate with the teachers. Teachers who supported her the most were Ms. Fiore and Ms. Weislow. Ms. Fiore often pushed her to speak in only English. Karla recalled, “We got mad at her because we could only speak Spanish, but it was helpful for us to practice.” Another challenge was managing her time. She worked 40 hours a week at a restaurant, getting home around 11pm. Then, she would do homework until 12:30-1am. The next day in school, she would try not to fall asleep. “The teachers didn't let me sleep in classes even though I really wanted to.”

Karla got a lot of support from her family, who told her that, “school is really important, and if you know English you can find a better job. You can help more people.” Her friends were also a strong source of support. When she wanted to quit, they would say, “Don't do it. You're smart Karlita, you can do it!”

In May, Karla passed an Honors Entrepreneurship class at Bunker Hill Community College. She wants to continue studying Business Administration and Management. She was awarded the Comcast Leaders and Achievers Scholarship. In her scholarship application, she wrote about supporting other students who were learning English. In addition to translating for other Spanish speakers, she also gave talks to newcomers. “I told them I was in the same place before. Don't give up, continue. Keep practicing English. One day you will learn. One day you will be close to graduating.”



Adamaris Sanchez
Age 18 from Lynn, MA



Class of 2018

“When you want to succeed as bad as you want to breathe, then you’ll be successful.”

Adamaris, or Ada (for her friends) has always been a good student. She was making Honor Roll at Lynn Tech, before coming to Phoenix. She came to Phoenix because her sister was coming to Phoenix. “My mom and dad pushed me to come to Phoenix. My mom applied for my sister to go to Phoenix and my dad convinced me by showing me all the opportunities here.” She really struggled with the different grading policy, “grading was hard”, but she likes the small classroom sizes and believes that Phoenix has made her better person and not just academically, “It made me really challenge myself as a person.”

Adamaris joined Phoenix as a Junior, became a senior soon thereafter, and is graduating in just one short year at Phoenix. She not only earned all the credits required for graduation in that one year, but also took an Intro to Psychology class at Bunker Hill to earn college credit. Her greatest achievement at Phoenix is “acing [her] Bunker Hill Class”. Managing high school, Bunker Hill class and work was not easy. She had to take extensive notes, keep up with all her work and learn how to manage her time well. She is really proud of herself for managing all her commitments and learning so much in the process.

She is really thankful to her Mom for making her come to Phoenix and her dad for being so supportive of her journey. Adamaris wants to be a therapist or social worker. She is planning to attend North Shore Community College for two years and then transfer to Salem State to study Psychology. She says, “What kept me going was all the support I had. I tried hard not to have an excuse about stuff that’s going on in life and kept on challenging myself because I want to do better in life, earn some money, have a good family life and help people because people have helped me.” She believes that Phoenix has pushed her and challenged her in the best way possible. “Ms. Gupta, Mr. Bensko were always checking up on me about all my courses” and she thinks that is the unique selling point of Phoenix.

Her advice for current Phoenix students or rising seniors is, “come to school everyday, get your work done. Be smart about your goals, don’t get sidetracked”.