



Learner's Name: Sofia Castillo
Age: 14
Location: Los Angeles, California

Can you tell me what your home and family are like?

I live alone with my mom, and my dad is back in Mexico. My mom moved us here when I was really young – I don't even remember it. She works for some rich people here in LA. I get to hang out at the house sometimes, which I love because it's so big and everything is so fancy. I also like playing with their kids. They have a lot of cool computer and handheld games that they let me play that we wouldn't have money for if I couldn't hang out with them.

My dad visits when he can, but he could never find work here so he always goes back to Mexico where he knows he can find steady work. Right now he is working on a fruit farm that sends fruit all over the world. He said he is worried that he might get fired because something called "slow food" has gone mainstream, which means people don't want their food coming from 2000 miles away.

Can you tell me more about your family?

Well, my parents had me when they were really young and they wanted the best life for me. So they moved here to LA, but, like I said, when my dad couldn't find a job here, he went back to Mexico. We miss him a lot. I really want to grow up to be a businesswoman and have a lot of money, so that I can take care of my mom and bring my dad here and we can all be together again. And we can all live in a house like my mom's boss.

My mom knew that the best chance I had at a really good education where we live was to get me into this learning program. Since we technically live outside of its limits and it's a private school that is supposed to give you an advantage when you go to college, we have to pay for me to go there. The tuition is really high, but they have this program that lets kids who don't have a lot of money do internships, and then the company where the learner interns at pays the student's tuition. It's an awesome system because you get your tuition paid, plus you get work experience. And, you get to pick the company you want to intern for.

Like me, I'm interested in creating more jobs for people like my dad. So I am working for an economic development organization. What's really cool is I get to apply what I learn from my learning program when I am not doing my internship to the work I do at my internship. Just the other day I had to calculate how many jobs are needed and what those jobs would have to pay in order to support future immigration to Los Angeles. We had just learned how to do that in my economic history module.

How do you like to learn?

I like to learn by doing. I don't mind if I fail a couple of times, as long as I figure it out by the end. I like to ask a lot of questions and try a lot of different approaches to solving a problem, and figure out which way works best. This was a lot harder to do at the free learning center I went to before, because the resources were so limited. But in my new program, my learning agents can really support my learning style. Like when I was researching current and forecasted immigration populations online. There were all kinds of people saying all kinds of different things. Instead of telling me the right answer, my learning journey mentor showed me a couple of techniques for making sense of all of the stuff I found on Google.

How would you describe your current learning experiences?

At my program now, our tuition pays for the supplies so I can have what I need. And I don't feel as much pressure to get it right the first time, since I don't have to worry about supplies running out or breaking down, or of having a time limit. My learning agents seem less stressed out, and my mom seems really proud of the progress I'm making. One of my favorite parts, though, is the internship. I'm actually getting to go to a business building and see my work contribute to the decisions people are making about real world issues. I love that I get to explore my future career with people who can help me along and feel like I am making a difference.

Can you tell me more about your learning experiences?

I really liked the people at my free learning center, but it just didn't have a lot of stuff. So learners couldn't really *do* things as much, because that required using up the supplies. So we talked a lot about the right answers, but I didn't really understand anything that way. I need to actually do it for myself in order to get it. And since I couldn't, my assessments weren't that good, and I wasn't really motivated. I got frustrated really easily and thought about just not going anymore.

What do you like best?

That feeling I get when I figure something out is the best feeling ever. I love that I'm not held back or discouraged from failing. But the most motivating thing is knowing that what I'm doing now is making a difference now and preparing me for when I grow up. It makes me take my learning seriously, because I'm providing real business people with information to make real decisions. Having this authentic experience makes a huge difference to me.

What do you want to do when you get older?

I really want to own a business, so that I can create jobs to bring families like mine together. I also want to make money so I can have nice things. And I really want to be able to help out learners like me. I want to be a role model.

What worries you as you think about your future?

My mom and I were able to find a way to get me into a really great program, but what about the other kids whose parents can't find jobs? Is it really fair to sentence kids to poorer programs because of where their parents come from? And why is there even this huge difference between poorer programs and nicer programs? Why can't everyone have these opportunities?