

Vol. 2, Spring 2026

# NEXT MAGAZINE



## A LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

*Dear NGS Community,*

As this magazine goes to print, my wife and I are waiting for the arrival of our first baby. By the time you read this letter, we will be parents.

This moment has sharpened my understanding of why Next Generation Scholars exists, and why community, stability, and long-term support matter so deeply for families raising children in Marin. NGS was built on the belief that when we walk alongside students and families over time, opportunity multiplies and changes the trajectory of entire generations.

The past two years have changed me in ways I am still trying to understand. We lost three of our four parents. We planned a wedding while grieving. We stood in hospital rooms and at gravesides. There were weeks when we were helping one another pick out barongs and áo dài, and then days when we were sitting in hospital rooms saying our last goodbyes. Grief and joy did not take turns. They showed up together.

And now, in the middle of all of that, we are preparing to welcome a child, our very own next generation.

In quiet moments, I find myself thinking about where I started.

I grew up at 855 C Street in downtown San Rafael, in low-income and tight quarters. On most afternoons, you could find me at Pickleweed Park in the Canal, playing basketball until the sun went down and the lights flickered on. That court was more than a place to play. It was where I learned how to compete, how to lose, how to lead, and how to belong.

I did not know it then, but I was being shaped by the community.

NGS became a second home to me. It was where I met friends I still have today. It was where mentors pushed me, believed in me, and sometimes saw strength in me before I did. It was where I began to understand that leadership is not about being the loudest voice in the room, but about showing up consistently for the people around me. Today, as I prepare to become a father, I understand my own parents differently. I see their sacrifices more clearly. I feel the weight of





what it means to create stability when resources are scarce. I feel the responsibility of modeling resilience when life unfolds, unplanned.

I stand on their shoulders. I stand on the shoulders of mentors who invested in a kid from the Canal and treated his dreams like they were actually possible.

That investment is why leading NGS is not just a role for me. It is personal mission, a continuation of something that was once extended to my family.

The theme woven throughout this magazine is “In Community, Together.” For me, these aren’t just sentimental words, but a lived experience. None of us survives loss alone. None of us celebrates milestones alone. And no Scholar reaches their fullest potential alone.

The stories in these pages are stories of strength and resilience. They are stories of families navigating housing instability, language barriers, new school systems, and grief. They are also stories of laughter, growth, and courage. They are reminders that when people walk alongside one another for the long term, transformation happens.

As our own family welcomes a baby into this world, I think about the kind of community I want my child to grow up in; one where opportunity is abundant and one where belonging is not something you earn, but something you are given.

I am proud and honored to lead this work, and I am grateful that you are part of it.

Thank you for believing in our Scholars. Thank you for believing in families like mine. And thank you for choosing, again and again, to build this community, together.

With gratitude,

*Nghiem Bui*

Executive Director  
Program Alum '07  
Next Generation Scholars



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*We are proud to share that all photos featured in NGS Magazine are credited to Sterling Rodas, NGS Alum, Class of 2019.*

## A SAFE ZONE FOR THE ESTRADA FAMILY

Jessica Estrada first learned about Next Generation Scholars through her neighbors, whose daughters were thriving in the program and eventually graduated from college. When Jessica's sister heard about the program, she enrolled her daughters. After seeing the success her sister's children achieved, she knew she wanted her own daughters to have the same opportunities. As soon as her children Valeria and Andrea reached the sixth grade, she enrolled them. Today, they are in 10th and 8th grade, growing and gaining confidence through their years with NGS.

For the Estrada family, NGS has been more than academic support; it has been a source of stability during challenging times. When the family faced housing insecurity, NGS stepped in with assistance that kept them secure. "NGS is my safe zone, my comfort. I felt supported, knowing they would help us in any way possible," Jessica says.

Jessica also found her own path to empowerment through NGS' computer literacy classes. Starting with almost no experience, she learned to write emails, create reports and navigate digital tools essential to her job. Her new skills improved her performance so much that she earned

*"I feel great having my children in the program," she says. "I know they will prosper."*



We are proud that our Scholar House is a place of comfort for so many students and families.

a promotion. Coaching from NGS staff helped her address workplace challenges with confidence, giving her tools she didn't have before.

The whole family has built a community through NGS. Jessica's husband, Cristobal, works in the NGS garden alongside other families, creating connection and shared purpose. Meanwhile, Valeria and Andrea have gained opportunities that Jessica once never imagined: including private school access, leadership training, and creative expression.

One of Jessica's proudest moments came when she watched Valeria, once very shy, speak onstage at a Marin Shakespeare Company event in partnership with NGS. "She spoke beautifully and confidently," Jessica recalls. "At NGS, Valeria found her voice. They taught her that her voice matters."

Looking back, Jessica feels immense gratitude for the program that has supported her family in so many ways. "I feel great having my children in the program," she says. "I know they will prosper."

## CARVING BELONGING, EXPANDING POSSIBILITIES: BARBARA'S SHINING EXAMPLE FOR THE NEXT GENERATION

Barbara has been part of Next Generation Scholars since 7th grade, alongside her older brother and cousins Valentina and Dulce. Known affectionately as “the triplets,” she, Dulce, and Valentina have thrived together in the NGS community. As the daughter of Mexican immigrants, Barbara is part of the first generation in her family to grow up in the United States.

She attends The Branson School on a full scholarship, where she has taken on the challenge of navigating a rigorous, predominantly white academic environment. In the face of both cultural and academic challenges, the transition was not easy, but Barbara leaned into the opportunity and built a strong sense of belonging.

There, she became a leader of the Latinx Club, played four years of girls basketball, joined the mountain biking team, and contributed to the yearbook. Her resilience and determination have made her an integral part of her campus community, where she is respected and well-loved.

Barbara is both responsible and fun-loving, balancing mature dependability with a playful “Barbi” side that shines once she feels comfortable. This mix of

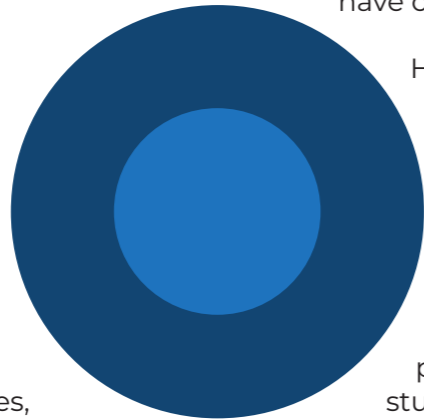
reliability and joy draws others to her, especially younger students. Teachers trust her completely, describing her as consistently dependable and willing to step up.

She has also faced deep personal loss with the passing of close family members, yet her strength and willingness to lean on her community have only deepened her courage.

Her Community Uplift Project, Empowerment Entre Los Deportes, is a powerful example of her leadership.

Alongside Dulce, she designed and ran a five-week sports and health program for elementary students at Little Scholars, combining basketball, soccer, and flag football with lessons on nutrition and hydration. Fearless in both planning and execution, Barbara inspired the younger students through her high expectations, creativity, and warmth, making the program a resounding success.

As Barbara embarks on her senior year, we are cheering her on every step of the way. When she walks across the stage at graduation, we know that she will not only be surrounded by love and support, but also by younger students who see their own possibilities reflected in her shining example.



Left to Right: Valentina, Dulce, and Barbara, known affectionately as “the triplets” at NGS

## CULTIVATING JUSTICE: REVITALIZING OUR NGS COMMUNITY GARDEN

At Next Generation Scholars, we believe that caring for our community also means caring for the land that nourishes us. That's why we are excited to share our vision for restoring and revitalizing our beloved community garden, El Jardín de Justicia.

Thanks to funding awarded to us by Marin County called the 'Measure A Food, Agriculture and Resilient Ecosystems (FARE)' Grant, our community garden is blooming with possibilities.

This year, we've worked with NGS parents on bringing the garden back to life: repairing irrigation systems, replacing fencing, enriching the soil, and building raised beds. With NGS parents serving as experts on landscaping and gardening, we are pleased to provide them with part-time employment through this grant award.

Thanks to their leadership, we'll also be introducing composting and rainwater harvesting systems, making sure that our space is as sustainable as it is welcoming. With these improvements, the garden will once again thrive as a shared resource for our families and neighbors here in San Rafael.

But the garden is not just about food or plants: it's about leadership, learning,

and connection. We're creating opportunities for students and parents alike to grow as leaders through workshops on gardening, nutrition, and environmental stewardship. Together, we'll host volunteer days, gardening clubs, and community events that bring people of all ages together in the spirit of collaboration and care.

Through El Jardín de Justicia, we also hope to improve access to fresh, healthy food for NGS families. Families will be able to tend their own garden plots, bring home fresh produce, and even learn new recipes through cooking demonstrations led by current Scholars who will make the garden a focus of their Community Uplift Projects\*.

You can now see new garden plots in our backyard, along with workshops and gardening clubs launched this past September, and our first student-led community presentation in December. Looking further ahead, our dream is for the garden to strengthen food security, support healthier lifestyles, and foster an environmentally conscious community where neighbors connect and collaborate.

Most of all, El Jardín de Justicia will be a living reminder of what we can grow & harvest when we work together.



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\*The Community Uplift Project empowers Scholars to make a meaningful, direct impact on their communities, while bolstering their applications and candidacy for acceptance and financial support to competitive colleges and universities.



NEXT GENERATION SCHOLARS

## ILLUMINATING & ELEVATING AT OUR INAUGURAL GALA

Last Spring, we hosted our first Gala event, centered around our theme of “Illuminate & Elevate” to celebrate our Scholars and their bright futures as they reach new heights.

Though galas are traditionally an upscale event, we were committed to hosting our Gala the NGS way: by inviting guests to our house, welcoming everyone as they are, and making sure that every person there felt like they belonged. We were pleased to welcome so many supporters who believe in our mission to uplift first generation college students so they can create pathways for prosperity for themselves and their families.

Highlights of the event include a keynote address delivered by NGS alum Vincent Alvarez, a speech by college-bound Scholar Elisa, and a lively auction.

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L: Vincent Alvarez delivers an energizing keynote speech; Elisa shares her passions and creativity.



**KEYNOTE SPEAKER VINCENT EMBODIES THE NGS SUCCESS STORY**

Vincent was the perfect person to deliver the keynote address because he embodies the NGS success story. As the youngest of five children, he grew up facing financial hardship, experiencing housing instability, all while staying committed to his education. Though he remained academically strong, he lacked the guidance and support needed to navigate the college process- until he found NGS, which played a pivotal role in shaping his path forward.

Today, Vincent is now paying it forward as the Director of Apprenticeship and Work-Based Learning Programs at the City Colleges of Chicago.

**ELISA: A BRIGHT STAR SHARES HER LIGHT**

Elisa is yet another bright star in the NGS constellation. From securing a full-ride scholarship to The Branson School, to successfully advocating for funding for an educational trip to Spain, Elisa is a goal-getter who seizes every opportunity with determination and grace. Her leadership extends beyond academics: through her participation in our Community Uplift Program, she also created a summer art program for low-income youth, sharing her passion for creativity with others.



Auctioneer and Emmy-Award winning television and radio personality Liam Mayclem lit up our stage with his energizing presentation.

**A DYNAMIC, LIVELY AUCTION HELPED US RAISE \$138,000**

Thanks to the generosity of local businesses in Marin County, we had the opportunity to offer high-quality auction items at our Gala, including exclusive VIP baseball tickets for the SF Giants, a winery tour, luxury dining experiences, and so much more. These prizes helped us exceed our \$100K fundraising goal, allowing us to continue supporting our Scholars.

We thank everyone who came to support our first ever Gala event, and we look forward to welcoming you at the next one!

To see how your donations have impacted the futures of our Scholars, check out the next page to see how your investment was put into action.

*The ultimate highlight of the event was uniting with the community that supports our work.*

*We thank everyone who came to support our first ever Gala event, and we look forward to welcoming you at the next one!*

# FUND-A-FUTURE UPDATES

**\$100**  
**Employment Training for Parents**  
Total Buyers: 9  
Total Sales: \$900

**\$250**  
**Breakfast & Lunch for Students (6th-12th)**  
Total Buyers: 12  
Total Sales: \$3,000

**\$2,500**  
**Little Scholars Summer Sponsorship**  
Total Buyers: 8  
Total Sales: \$20,000

**\$5,000**  
**Funds 85 Community Uplift Projects**  
Total Buyers: 5  
Total Sales: \$25,000

**\$500**  
**Summer Field Trips**  
Total Buyers: 9  
Total Sales: \$4,500

**\$1,000**  
**Learning Materials for Students**  
Total Buyers: 12  
Total Sales: \$12,000

**\$10,000**  
**Subsidizes 1 Student Through Academy**  
Total Buyers: 1  
Total Sales: \$10,000

**\$25,000**  
**Breakfast & Lunch for 85 Students (1st-12th)**  
Total Buyers: 1  
Total Sales: \$25,000



Big brother Andy with his little sister Keisy

## MEET ANDY, TRUE SCHOLAR AND ULTIMATE OLDER BROTHER

Andy is the ultimate older brother. A role model to his younger sister Keisy, Andy embodies what it means to be a Scholar: leading with kindness, taking responsibility, and being intentional about setting a positive example. Like many students at NGS, Andy is motivated by the opportunity to be the first in his family to go to college, demonstrating possibilities for his sister (who is currently enrolled in our Little Scholars program) to follow in his footsteps.

Andy's teachers describe him as gregarious, warm, and charismatic. Though he is funny and lighthearted, he is serious about his education, making him equally loved and respected by his peers and teachers alike.

Despite this, Andy's journey is not without its challenges. Coming from a predominantly Latinx middle school in Marin, Andy had difficulty finding his place at University High School in San Francisco, an environment that posed a striking difference to Andy's upbringing. At UHS, most students come from wealth, with lived experiences that Andy could not relate to. Additionally, his new academic environment was demanding, pushing Andy beyond his limits and his comfort zone.

For all of these reasons, Andy struggled both academically and socially in the beginning. In addition, his long commute to San Francisco from Marin often left Andy mentally and physically drained. When he would arrive at NGS for programs, you could sense that his energy diminished.

However, during this challenging transition, Andy made a mature choice to reflect deeply on his character and his experiences in order to ground himself. Additionally, with time and support from his teacher at NGS and his counselors at school, Andy found his place and sprung back to his old, outgoing self.

It is for this reason that Andy was awarded the "Most Committed" High School student this past Spring. As we continue following Andy's growth and journey, we are looking forward to the impact he is yet to make: for his Community Uplift Project, he envisions hosting a soccer camp for students and families that don't have access to attend expensive and exclusive camps.

We have no doubt that his younger sister is cheering him on from the sidelines as she grows with us at NGS.

We look forward to guiding both of them across the graduation goal line!



## KARINA'S RISING: STRONG FOUNDATIONS LEAD TO MEANINGFUL GROWTH

Karina has demonstrated exceptional growth in the past year, a growth rooted in the strong foundation she has at home. Karina lives with her mother and sister, a supportive unit that regards education as a cherished priority. Her mother, a steadfast advocate for her daughters, has become a familiar face at NGS and at her daughters' schools: serving on the PTA, attending events, and working closely with teachers to ensure both Karina and her sister have every opportunity to succeed.

Her mother's commitment extends beyond school walls. From joining the NGS parent committee to enrolling Karina in enrichment programs like a Sunday reading group, she has built a foundation of support that allows

Karina to thrive. This dedication is not only about pushing Karina to excel in academics; it is about showing Karina what it means to be persistent, engaged, and hopeful about the future.

The difference a parent's dedication makes is evident: this past Spring, Karina was awarded the "Most Committed" Award for the Middle School level.

Like many students, Karina was once distracted by her phone or by conversations with friends during class. But this past school year, her transformation did not go unnoticed: according to her teacher within NGS, she was noticeably more focused, connected, and self-aware. Today, she participates more in class, and

Karina receiving her award alongside Llesica, our Student Services Manager

*Motivated by her goal of becoming the first in her family to attend college and to make her family proud, Karina continues to demonstrate excellence and responsibility beyond her years.*

demonstrates a greater commitment to learning.

Moreover, Karina has shown remarkable resilience, responsibility, and determination. When she transferred to a new school, she faced the challenge of navigating an unfamiliar campus as a new student in a completely different system. Despite this transition, Karina leaned in without complaints whenever she was asked to attend extra tutoring sessions, complete homework assignments during her breaks, and participate in an extracurricular class on Sundays.

Motivated by her goal of becoming the first in her family to attend college and to make her family proud, Karina

continues to demonstrate excellence and responsibility beyond her years. When she earned prize money for her award, she used it thoughtfully, choosing to save it for her college fund. Karina's perseverance, positive attitude, and self-discipline make her a standout student and a role model for her peers. Karina's journey is a testament to the power of family support and the meaningful role NGS plays in helping students unlock their potential, not only in their academics, but in their personal growth and development.

We are proud to be a part of Karina's strong foundation, and look forward to the many ways in which she will continue to rise.



NEXT GENERATION SCHOLARS

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# CELEBRATING THE CLASS OF 2025: IN COMMUNITY, TOGETHER

At the end of last May, we gathered in the backyard of the Scholar House in San Rafael to celebrate a major milestone: the graduation of the Next Generation Scholars Class of 2025.

Our graduation event is more than a ceremony, but rather, a deeply meaningful moment that marks the culmination of a journey many years in the making. Our Scholars often begin with us as early as the first

grade, spending anywhere from 7 to 12 years in our programs. Over time, each student receives more than 1,600 hours of personalized support, not just academically, but in leadership development, identity-building, and personal growth.

Our Scholars grow up with us, so when they prepare to take flight, it's a moment of immense pride for the entire NGS community. Seeing them step into their

futures, wearing their college t-shirts and sharing where they're headed next, is a tangible reflection of what it means to invest in young people over the long-term.

During the ceremony, graduating seniors shared not only where they're going, but how far they've come. They highlighted the achievements of their Community Uplift Projects, powerful initiatives designed and led by Scholars to give back to their communities. Some of the powerful project outcomes include the following:

Christian helped organize a labor union at the restaurant where his mother works. Veronica launched BornInclusive, a youth-centered campaign advocating for diverse representation in social media. Jerson created a soccer program

for youth of color, serving 15 participants and creating a space for belonging through sports. These are just a few examples of the impact our Scholars are making. Each project is a reflection of their values, leadership, and commitment to paying it forward.

This year's theme, "In Community, Together," honors the village that uplifts every Scholar, from NGS staff and mentors to families and friends. It also reflected the unique strength of the NGS model: a holistic approach that nurtures not only college access, but lifelong confidence and purpose.

As we celebrated our graduates, we also celebrated the collective love, labor, and learning that shaped their journey. It truly takes a village.

## AND THE AWARD GOES TO...

Special Recognition for NGS Community Members & Scholars



### **MOST COMMITTED PARENT: BENJAMIN**

We are so grateful to honor Benjamin at this year's graduation as the "Most Committed NGS Parent." The time, energy, and love he has poured into our organization is deeply felt and appreciated. Thank you, Benjamin!



### **MOST COMMITTED MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENT: KARINA**

Karina's perfect attendance and consistent participation in NGS programs were recognized at graduation through her award as "Most Committed Middle School Student." Karina's exemplary dedication and work ethic inspires us.



### **ANDY: MOST COMMITTED HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT**

Despite his long commute by bus and on foot (over 1,000 commuting hours this year!), Andy always shows up ready and excited to engage with NGS. We are so lucky to have him as part of our organization, and we're thrilled to award him the title of "Most Committed High School Student" at this year's graduation event.

## HELPING OUR LITTLE SCHOLARS FLOURISH IN PARTNERSHIP WITH KUMON SAN RAFAEL

Last summer, Next Generation Scholars took an important step forward in our commitment to academic equity. We launched a new partnership between our Little Scholars Program and Kumon San Rafael, one that ensures that every child receives the tools they need to thrive.

During our Summer Programs in 2025, our Little Scholars received personalized, in-person academic support through Kumon's structured math and reading program. For many of our students, this meant receiving consistent after-school learning tailored to their individual needs. Through this program, they received support designed to not only help them catch up, but to help them feel confident in their abilities.





**THIS COLLABORATION IS GUIDED BY FOUR CORE COMMITMENTS:**

- Accelerate academic growth for our youngest learners
- Prevent summer learning loss before it widens existing gaps
- Nurture students' social and emotional well-being
- Give parents the freedom to pursue and sustain employment by providing a high-quality, no-cost academic alternative to summer childcare

In San Rafael, ~24% of elementary students are reading at grade level by third grade. Among students entering Little Scholars, ~25% are proficient in reading or math, two academic milestones that strongly shape future high school graduation and college access. These numbers represent children who are bright, capable, and full of potential, but who have not yet been given equitable access to the resources that help that potential flourish.

Through this partnership, 80 students received Kumon instruction tailored to their specific learning levels. It is intentional, steady support that builds skills over time and strengthens confidence along the way.

By working together with Kumon San Rafael and community partners, we are investing in sustained opportunities to close the gaps where they exist and expanding what feels possible for our students, their families, and our entire community.

