USFers Tutor San Francisco’s Homeless Students

Living out of a car with family members and couch surfing at relatives’ homes can wreak havoc on young peoples’ educations and lead many to drop out of school. Yet, a good education might be their best chance to build a more stable future. That’s why USF Learning and Writing Center students tutor dozens of homeless and disadvantaged San Francisco school kids each year, offering one-on-one assistance.

“I joined the program because I feel like education is a big part of the world,” says math major Lucy Rodriguez ’18. “I feel like that’s pretty much where everything starts.”

Aspiring to return home

It certainly did for Rodriguez, who grew up in South Los Angeles, and credits a high school adviser and teacher with inspiring her to be a better student. That positive relationship, more than any other, is why Rodriguez joined USF’s dual degree program in teaching and why she aspires to return one day to South Los Angeles to teach.

“Maybe one of the students I tutor or someone I teach in the future will say, ‘That tutor, that teacher, Lucy, she helped me. She made it really fun and amazing for me, so I think I want to go and do this or that,’” Rodriguez says.

About 20-30 Learning and Writing Center students work each year with San Francisco Unified School District’s Families and Youth in Transition (FYIT) office, which serves homeless kids, many living in shelters with their families. More than 400 local elementary, middle, and high school students have benefited from the USF-FYIT partnership.

Someone to listen
“Most of our student body lives in Visitation Valley, Sunnydale, and the Bayview neighborhoods. Many of the students have experienced complex trauma and face challenging socioeconomic factors,” says Matthew Schwartz, who directs FYIT tutoring at Visitation Valley Middle School.

In some cases, multilingual USF student-tutors have forged long-term relationships with recent immigrant students, helping them adjust to a new country and language, and remaining connected beyond FYIT, Schwartz says.

“USF’s mission is to ‘change the world from here’ and by tutoring kids who don’t have a home or are in transition and need one stable factor in their lives, it really helps,” says Lupe Velazquez ’18, a sociology major who’s tutored with FYIT for two semesters. “Sometimes you go in and they just need someone to listen to them, because they don’t really have anybody else.”

Rodriguez and Velazquez say they too have benefitted from FYIT. She’s learned to be flexible and adjust her teaching approach to individual students, Rodriguez says. And Velasquez strengthened her commitment to social justice and serving those in need and improved her time-management skills, she says.

**Speaks to USF values**

“This is a great partnership that speaks directly to USF’s values and is just one of several programs run by the Learning and Writing Center, including a partnership with America Reads that has helped thousands of San Francisco students over the years, and free college-level language, tutoring, and writing assistance on just about any subject for USFers,” says Kimberly Harris, the center’s assistant director.

*Know someone with a powerful USF story? Let us know!* [usfnews@usfca.edu](mailto:usfnews@usfca.edu) | [Twitter](https://twitter.com/usfcanews) @usfcanews