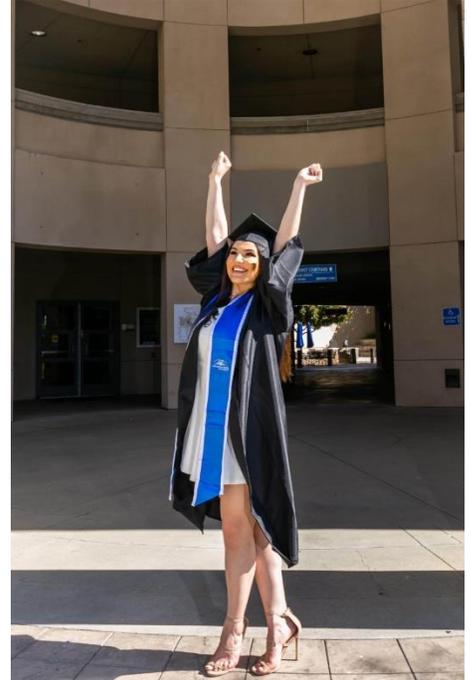


Lenya Valdez is a proud daughter of Mexican immigrants and the oldest in her home. She was born in San Diego she grew up in Tijuana, Baja California and with Spanish as her first language, Lenya was often placed in Spanish speaking classrooms until she got to high school. She knew she had to practice more English and she was new to the idea of being “college ready,” that is when MANA de San Diego’s Hermanitas Youth Leadership Mentor Program came into the picture. Now she is a first-generation college graduate and her younger brother is following her footsteps as he just started freshman year of college.

Lenya first heard about Hermanitas Youth Mentor Leadership Program through a family friend at the end of her freshman year of high school. The program sounded like a great opportunity for her so she decided to apply and began her time as an Hermanita during her sophomore year. She says about her time as an Hermanita, “Everything was so new to me...being first generation I was unaware of it all, so through Hermanitas I became aware of the process...all the steps [for college readiness]. I’m very grateful for my mentor. She introduced me to so many things and learned a lot from what the Hermanitas Program brings to the table.” Lenya still keeps in touch with her mentor, Chastity, and they continue to have a strong relationship.



In terms of her transition to college, Lenya saw the impact of the TIAS program led by Norma Jasso. “Even if I didn’t reach out, Hermanitas was always there checking in by sending emails, postcards, and even little goodies. Hermanitas has always kept in touch and they have always been there for me. Recently they asked me if I needed help with my resume, so since day one they have been there for me,” says Lenya. She is looking forward to giving back to the program once she is more established in her career. “Being a mentor has always been on my mind. I want to take that leadership role and help a mentee. I want to provide good resources and be a role model.”

Lenya graduated this past spring from CSU San Marcos with a BA in Criminology and Justice Studies and a minor in Spanish. When asked about what her next steps are, she answered, “To be honest with you, I’m still trying to figure it all out. I’m more inclined to social work, forensics, juveniles and narcotics side of law enforcement. That area has always sparked my attention. In a dream world and based on my current interests, an investigator or crime analyst sound like ideal careers but I find helping others rewarding as well so there are many opportunities. I’m unsure about the next steps and would love some help.”

Can you help Lenya figure out her next steps? If so, please reach out to [manasd@manasd.org](mailto:manasd@manasd.org) and we will get you in touch with Lenya.