

Cudas Unhooked: The Bridge to Success

By Gabrielle Dinardi



“Cudas Unhooked” is a program that has been implemented in the local high school of my own home town. I am a proud alumnus of this school, and I am delighted to be a part of a community that has a program such as this one to reach out to at-risk and homeless teens struggling to get by. As most people know, high school is already a difficult period of life, so it is a very good thing to attempt to offer any assistance and support that we can as a community in order to make the lives of some of these young students easier. Since the establishment in 2009, the program has supported over 180 students through mentor pairings, personal development assistance, and provision of shelter.

The program has a catch phrase, which is “providing necessary support to at-risk students dedicated to becoming educated, independent, contributing members of society.” This is so important because students at this age should be focusing on completing their homework on time and getting good grades, not wondering where their next meal is going to be coming from or where they are going to sleep that night. If a homeless teenager is provided with a safe place to live during high school, he or she is going to be significantly more likely to graduate, further his or her education, and find a successful career later in life. Without this assistance, that same teenager may end up never finishing high school, turning to drugs, and never exiting the circle of poverty and homelessness.

This kind of a program would not be possible without a whole community backing it up with support, by volunteering both monetarily and with time. 786 donors help to make the Cudas Unhooked program possible, with 171 of those being local businesses within our community. In the nine years that the program has been running, over 100 people have volunteered in some aspect within the program. Finally, volunteers with Habitat for Humanity helped to build the Cuda House, which makes the sheltering of homeless students possible.

Cudas Unhooked includes “Four Pillars of Success,” also known as the four main projects that are included under this specific program. These pillars include *Senior Life*, *Personal Development*, *Mentoring*, and the *Cuda House*. Senior Life includes assistance that is provided for eligible students their last year of high school. This is a big year for all students, including important events such as prom, grad bash, and graduation. Through local support, students that would not have been able to afford the attire or tickets required for these events are not

having to miss out on some of the potential best nights of their lives. Personal Development allows at-risk students to learn about topics such as budgeting, getting jobs, applying to colleges, and other important skills necessary to future success. Mentoring allows students to get one-on-one time with volunteers who can provide emotional counseling as well as academic support to struggling students. Finally, the Cuda House provides shelter to homeless students who need help getting back on their feet. Many of these students have run away from abusive homes, so the Cuda House volunteers also work closely with the Department of Child Services to get these students the help they need.

This program is something that is very important to me, because I have friends who have been supported by the amazing, kind volunteers. It can really make a big difference in the way that these students view life and their various potentials to succeed. I hope that programs like this one begin to emerge in other cities, all over the nation and the world, because supporting our students is supporting our future.