

# Lack of a backpack sparked a life change for South Texas teen

August 15, 2016

PENITAS—Sometimes, something as simple as a plastic shopping bag can have such an impact on someone's life.

When Marilyn Garcia, now 18, was in kindergarten, her mother couldn't afford to buy a backpack for school, so she used a shopping bag. That seemingly insignificant plastic bag became the catalyst for changing Marilyn's life.

Early struggles



When Marilyn Garcia was having trouble finding scholarships to make her dream of a college education reality, she found help from a family coach at the Buckner Family Hope Center. Her classmates teased her about her makeshift backpack. Her mother was a single parent to Marilyn and her two older siblings. They recently had moved from Mexico to [Peñitas](#), just across the border in

Texas, and were scraping by.

It wasn't just her lack-of-backpack that caught the attention of her classmates. She struggled with learning English her first few years in school.

"I've been through a lot," she said. "We all go through a lot of hard stuff. But I know that when we came over here, when my mom came over here, we had a lot of trouble finding somewhere to live."

### **Motivation to excel**

Some might wither under the constant teasing, but Marilyn used it as an opportunity to prove everyone wrong. She saw her mom working hard every day at a clothing warehouse, trying to provide for Marilyn and her siblings.

"My mom is really hardworking," she said. "She was working for me to become somebody, so why would I listen to somebody telling me not to overcome the teasing? I tried really hard. I was a top reader in my class. My grades were really good—they were all As. I tried very hard to overcome what they were telling me. My mom has been my motivation. She's worked really hard for me, so I'm trying to do the same for her."

### **Scholarship assistance**

When Marilyn was having trouble finding scholarships for college, the school counselor recommended she go to the [Buckner Family Hope Center](#) for help.

Marilyn, her mom and the counselor went to meet with Gabriel Flores, family coach at the center. He helped explain the college application process to Marilyn and her mom, along with some options for scholarships.

Toward the end of their visit, he casually asked Marilyn for an essay about

her life and why she works so hard. Marilyn wrote it and didn't think anything of it.



Marilyn Garcia wants to study nursing in college, with the ultimate goal of becoming a medical doctor. Several weeks later, she received a surprise phone call from Flores. She had been awarded a Buckner scholarship to pay for tuition.

### **Unbreakable spirit**

“As I got to know Marilyn’s story, I thought of the verse in 2nd Timothy: ‘For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline,’” Flores said.

“Marilyn has been through so many tragedies—like her father leaving them, moving to a different country, learning a different language and other

instances worthy of discouragement. But to see her at the top of her class simply tells me she has an unbreakable and determined spirit. We could not think of a more deserving student for this scholarship.”

Marilin graduated third in her high school class and is enrolled to attend the University of Texas at the Rio Grande Valley in the fall. She’s going to study nursing, but her dream is to become a doctor eventually and to help people with low income get the medical care they need.

“I’m really grateful that Buckner is here for me. They’ve been really nice to me, and every time I need something and I ask, they help me. I’ve been coming to their events to help out. So, we’re working together. Hopefully we get more involved with each other.”