

The Office Group (TOG) prides itself on being an exemplary and helpful organization for students in the Bend-Lapine area. However, it's so much more than an organization; it's the people, the volunteers, the opportunities it provides, the space it creates, and the tools it has to give that make it TOG.

When I first joined TOG in 2019 as a sophomore in high school, I was at a very low point in my life, unaware that things were about to get much harder and more complicated for me, and that my dreams would be obscured from me for the first time. When I first joined TOG, I thought it would be an afterschool club that provided me with tutoring that I couldn't otherwise afford.

While it was an excellent tutoring resource for me (one that without it I may not have passed Calculus), TOG ended up becoming an actual home for me too. Before my senior year of high school, I found myself with no place to live. My choices were either to find and pay for housing on my own, or to move away from the town, community, friends, school, and clubs that I had grown and flourished with for so long. It was those at TOG, who dedicate their lives to students, who dedicate their lives and jobs to my future, and to my well-being, that pulled me out of this place and gave me hope and a home again.

Although my story is unique, as is every single student who comes through TOG's doors, those at TOG helped me find solutions and pull myself back up again. I remember the second TOG caught wind of my situation, there was an emergency board meeting. At this meeting, I am told, every adult there wanted to help. Their kindness through and through does not go unnoticed by the students they help. It is this kindness and desire to boost us up that TOG does best and one of the most life-changing things one can bestow on a student who has not had these things in so long.

While all this was going on, it was also time for me to start thinking about college. This is when Teresa, TOG's resident college advisor, suggested QuestBridge to me. She helped me endlessly with creating my list of desired colleges and refining my essays, all the while ensuring that the decisions I was making were entirely my own. This gave me a sense of agency I didn't know I craved so much before that. Further, with the gentle direction and expertise of TOG, it was suggested to me that I should apply to Stanford. I had high hopes for my future and had worked incessantly in high school, both inside and outside of the

classroom, for a chance to break my familial pattern and poverty.

Now that I am halfway through my undergraduate education here at Stanford, I have had more time to reflect. I can reflect on all that TOG has done for me and what it means to me. Kristal and Corben, co-founders of TOG, make an effort to visit me, and their other past students who are now in college. I remember the first time they visited last year when I was able to tell them how I had never felt so at home and at peace in my life. This is what TOG has been able to foster for me; somewhere I feel like I can belong, where I can be me, and where I am raised up for my goals and ideas, not torn down by my background and experiences.

I owe it all to TOG, and, of course, the board members would tell me that I owe it to myself. While this is partially true, I couldn't have done it on my own. I couldn't have prepped myself for the SAT and ACT because I worked thirty hours a week. TOG made sure I got tutoring and had the opportunity to take the exam out of state when it wasn't offered in Oregon. I wouldn't have known to apply to QuestBridge without the knowledge of TOG employees. And I wouldn't have been comfortable in myself if TOG hadn't given me the tools and opportunities to believe in myself and accomplish what I knew I was capable of all along.

I know I am not alone when I say these words but The Office Group changed my life and I will support it until I die in the hope that it can do the same for others.