



# ‘It saved my life’

Breaking Chains Academy is changing lives through mentoring Treasure Valley youth

At 19 years old, Luis Granados was arrested and expected to spend 15 years behind bars. A Canyon County judge saw potential in him and cut his time down to just one year.

That second chance has since given thousands of Treasure Valley youth a second chance of their own.

**Breaking Chains Academy is a Nampa-based, non-profit organization helping local kids, many with gang affiliations, find a new path, support systems and a second home.**

Gang activity surrounded Granados for most of his young life. As an elementary school student, he went from an observer to a member. “I thought because I’m from where I’m from, because I look the way I do, this is what I’m supposed to do,” he said. “I didn’t really see a different route, a different path. I didn’t see anyone who looked like me in different places.” His involvement was innocent at first, just a group of kids hanging out. As he got older, the seriousness of his involvement deepened.

At 15, he was pulled into OGS BAD, an organization helping young people with gang affiliations find mentorship and resources. Through his involvement with the program, Granados earned his GED/HSE and gained work experience.

But his gang affiliations were still with him when he was arrested at 19. “I remember sitting in that cell and reflecting on this and thinking, ‘I did it, I ruined my life. This is it, this is how my story ends,’” he said.

Granados would have spent nearly two decades in prison but due to his education, experience and support, he was released on a 10-year probation. Freshly out of jail, Granados said he went straight to the same program he now runs as executive director—Breaking Chains Academy.

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Breaking Chains Academy  
Executive Director,  
Luis Granados



## Breaking Chains Academy Mentoring Idaho Youth



BCA Students (left to right): Gustavo, Nyemah and Bobby

**“Come hang out, let us become friends. Just know that you are loved, and you do matter. ... Although you may feel stuck, we will help you get where you need to go.”**

**– Luis Granados**



Breaking Chains Academy in Nampa is a non-profit serving local youth most with gang affiliations get an education, mentorship and resources otherwise unavailable. The multi-room space offers classrooms, a kitchen and plenty of hangout spaces. Granados said the space is available for students to come get their lessons done or even just relax.

### Another chance and another family

Nyemah, a Breaking Chains student, said the space is like a second home. Home for her means being responsible for 11 siblings while also taking care of herself—all at 17 years old.

Breaking Chains and the staff who run it are the ones Nyemah and other students turn to for even the most basic needs, such as hygiene products for themselves and family.

“It’s genuinely like another home here,” she said. “I brought my little sisters in here when we didn’t have food stamps, didn’t have money to pay the bills. They came in here and have gotten their hygiene products out of the closet, they’ve eaten, taken a nap. You know when you don’t got anything, you don’t have anywhere to go, don’t have family, you can come here.”

In partnership with Optum Idaho and other local organizations, onsite is a closet filled with daily essentials the kids might not otherwise have access to—body wash, shampoo, toothbrushes, coats and more.

While it may seem inconsequential, taking care of the bare minimum needs can be the first step to getting the student the support needed.

“We got to meet them at where they are. For us that means making sure their basic needs are met—food, hygiene, love, care, guidance. That needs to be tackled first,” he said. “Once that’s tackled, then we can start adding more to their plate...but those basic needs are what need to be met first before any of that happens.”

Gustavo, a 17-year-old student with the program, has been involved for most of his life. Before Granados took over Breaking Chains Academy, Gustavos’s father ran it. Now, a graduate, he hopes to be in the executive director’s office one day as well.

“I want to be here,” Gustavo said. “My dad used to run it, Luis runs it and he’s like a second pop. One day I want to be running it, keep it going on the northside. Even though I graduated, I’m still here every day. I like to be here, I love it here.”

Many of those with the program end up there because it starts with they have to be there—but Granados said it quickly becomes they are there because they want to be there.

To anyone who isn’t at Breaking Chains Academy and needs support, Granados has a simple message.

“Come hang out, let us become friends,” he said. “Just know that you are loved, and you do matter. The community does care about you, and although you may feel stuck, we will help you get where you need to go.”

For more information on Breaking Chains Academy and how to support, go to their website at [www.breakingchainsacademy.com](http://www.breakingchainsacademy.com).

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