



UTEC 2Gen Best Practices Testimonials from Young Parents

Brian Alvarado

“UTEC taught me how to respect others and how diversity plays an important role in my life. Thanks to UTEC, I was able to make friends and create beautiful memories that will last a lifetime. I am thankful because I learned to challenge myself and to strive to become a better human being.”

“UTEC will forever be part of my being. It shaped me into a person that loves to give back. In my youth, when I went through a tough time at home, UTEC was my lighthouse letting me know that there was a clear direction. To date, I miss all the programs and opportunities that UTEC offered me. But I am blessed to be able to stand back and witness what a powerhouse it has become.”

Jefferson Alvarez

“I was brought to UTEC when I was at my lowest. Everything I learned made me the man I am today and I am extremely grateful. Gregg is like your friendly neighborhood superhero without a cape, just saving lives by being himself and giving out the MADD LOVE he carries with him every day! Thank you for all you do.”

Jamel Bonilla

“I had no choice but to love UTEC or face jail time. I had to embody the culture and live by their rules. But as time went on I started falling in love with what they stood for and how they stood up for youth. One of my first memories was going to court for a hearing and a Streetworker sitting with me all day until they called my name at the end of the day. He talked to me, fed me, listened to me, and when it was time to get picked up from that same courtroom a week later, he was there. My own family wasn't even there, but complete strangers were and that is something I will never forget.”

Jimmy Bo

“My time at UTEC was both humbling and inspiring. Not only did I acquire my diploma, but I got OSHA certified, ServSafe certified, and also an apprenticeship. I can't forget about the help I've gotten from 2Gen. Each day brought a new challenge, but it was inspiring to see how everyone came together with a shared purpose. I learned how small actions can have a big impact and felt a deep sense of fulfillment.”

Alex Casara

“UTEC helped shape me into someone who wants something more for the community rather than just being an invisible neighbor. Its sense of family has left me wanting that very same environment wherever I go, and I try to emulate it.”

Mada Camacho

“It was at UTEC that I saw the representation of young brown and black women going to college. I didn't think that was a possibility for me. I attended Middlesex Community College and went to New Orleans to rebuild homes. I also went to rural Peru with their nursing program to educate communities on health topics. Now, I'm a registered nurse and earned additional certifications in Addiction Medicine and Community Health Center Management. For the last ten years, I have given back as a nurse at the Lowell Community Health Center.”

**Fredo Estevez**

"I became a part of the UTEC family six years ago with a completely different outlook on life, a life with a rough path to success actually, but I also knew I was going to grow into someone big at UTEC! I have definitely grown mentally to be a better man & also lead youth into 'breaking barriers for success.' Thanks to my experience at UTEC, helping the upcoming youth is a career I am currently chasing."

Chernor Fofanah

"I came to Lowell from Sierra Leone in 1996, just a kid trying to find my place. When I found UTEC, it became my safe haven. Working with the Fresh Roots program taught me the joy of growing food from seed to harvest and taking it to the farmers market. For someone who's known food insecurity, it was powerful to be part of something that brought nourishment and joy to others. Today, I keep those values close, hoping to create the same impact for young people facing tough challenges."

David Hol

"What shaped me to be the person that I am today was the folks from my own city working and sharing what little they had. It was the simple things that made us forget that we all came from challenging living conditions. No responsibilities — just purely being a kid and enjoying the little things."

Davira Kuy

"Back in 2004, I was a high school student with a lot of potential but lacked the confidence to use my voice. It was around this time when I first discovered UTEC. UTEC helped me hone my skills as a public speaker and leader... now I travel around the country as a game show host. I found more connections and opportunities to not only empower myself, but also many people who are within my circle."

Tina McCall

"When I think back to my days at the start of it, I remember being excited about a place where I can see and meet up with all my friends in one place. UTEC has shaped who I am today and why I love working with youth. Though my work is in a group home setting now, I still use the tools and experiences I had as a young adult to guide me today."

Felicia Neov

"I started attending UTEC when I was 14 years old. UTEC helped me get through so many obstacles and changes during my life, and I'm very grateful for them. I honestly don't know where I'd be if it weren't for UTEC's help. My favorite memory has to be when we went on a camping trip!"

Luis Ortiz

"UTEC taught me to show up, work hard, and be consistent. It gave me the tools to hold a job and stay off the streets. Sako, Ant, Will, Nichelle, Derek Mitchell were instrumental in my growth at UTEC — I'm very grateful for all of their support."

Chirayu Patel

"UTEC has truly shaped my approach to leadership and community engagement, and I am grateful



for the experiences that have guided me. Today, I lead a finance organization with over 40 employees focused on keeping our men and women safe. Every time I hear 'UTEC,' I feel a deep sense of appreciation and excitement — it's a reminder of the valuable lessons I've learned and the people who helped me along the way."

Howie Rivera

"I remember reaching out to Leslie about UTEC. She got me in, and I went from cleaning the Moody's with Tom to culinary with Karen. I got involved with Teens Leading The Way with Geoff and had meetings with Governor Patrick and got to stand behind President Obama in Boston. It's always been love!"

Sophy Sam

"I was an awkward, lost, and confused teen when I found UTEC. My family and I were refugees from Cambodia and my parents didn't speak any English so it was hard for me to navigate through life — I was desperate to find a place where I felt like I belonged. I found that place in UTEC. UTEC introduced me to breakdancing, poetry, outreach, leadership, event planning, and policy making. Many of those skills have helped shaped the person I am today."

Alex Santana

"Attending UTEC was the most important life changing decision I have ever made in my life. I was a young adult who had so many struggles and bad habits that almost had me incarcerated. But UTEC changed that for me in the best way, I don't think I would be where I am today without the help. And for that I'm proud and thankful to call them my family."

Priscilla Velez

"I can't remember all of the programs I was in at UTEC! I was in so many of them and went on so many outings over the years until I left Lowell. I was in foster care for so many years, and UTEC was like my second home and was my escape from craziness. UTEC also helped me outside the program as well when I got kicked out and forced me to get my GED. Now I'm an Optometrist receptionist and technician."

Jesse Velazquez

"I take pride in contributing to UTEC's growth and success, empowering my peers and driving initiatives that resonate within our community. The experiences I gained at UTEC have been instrumental in shaping my adult life, providing me with skills and insights that continue to guide my personal and professional endeavors."

Kasi Vega

"My experience at UTEC was great and I loved meeting new and important people and having new life experiences. This made me curious about figuring out who I am and who I want to be. It was the foundation of everything for me and has brought me full circle and I am now a youth worker."

Duke Vega

"I came at a tough legal time and was even a bit hopeless. I got involved and met so many good people who genuinely cared about my situation and progression. I learned good and helpful



woodworking skills and even participated in legislation! It was a unique experience and was transformational for me at a time when I needed it!"

Chris Wilson

"To date, I miss all the programs and opportunities that UTEC afforded me. In my youth, when I went through a tough time at home, UTEC was my lighthouse letting me know that there was a clear direction. It was my safe place when I had nowhere to go and what felt like no one to turn to. Today, UTEC is a family. My family."

Desiree Thornton

"My name is Desiree Thornton and I've been with UTEC since 2018. I was a young single mom of 2, about to be 3 children at only 20 years old. When I first started at UTEC I was doing a lot of mattress recycling work in the Transformational Beginnings program that UTEC has you start with before entering workforce programming. Transformational Beginnings showed me what it was like to have structure with having to be on time and to have consistency while staying committed to the work that we were doing. The Transitional Coaches and Streetworkers I met helped me right away by attending court dates with me, getting my ID and my driver's license, and helping me earn my high school equivalency. Juggling my work life with my children made my life very complicated and busy at times, but UTEC was able to provide sustainability to me through helping me with child care through the 2Gen Center once my newborn, Athena, was born. Once I made my way to the workforce program, I started out doing woodworking for my first year at UTEC, where I learned more of a sense of work ethic while also learning how to correct my own mistakes while holding my head up high. I took a short break from UTEC after woodworking while still utilizing the mental health services that UTEC provided to me through counseling, and I was able to come back shortly after to be in Organizing at UTEC. In Organizing, I learned how to use my voice and advocate for myself and others in my community. I learned how to make a positive impact for myself and others. UTEC's mental health staff made sure I got into counseling right away, too. It really helped me learn coping skills that helped me deal with what I was going through at the time. I think this support helped me get back on my feet so I could learn how to walk on my own in this life.

All along my side through struggles, and through the good and bad, the 2Gen Center was always there for me. When Athena was only 2 years old she had early intervention involved and I was not always able to be there for those appointments. When I was not able to be there, Rula from the 2Gen Center would always sit in on early intervention appointments with Athena to take notes just as I her mother would, and she would give them to me at the end of the day and tell me how the session went; it was like I never missed a beat. If I am greatly thankful for anything since I've had children it would be UTEC and them being such a big support system. They have helped me be able to help myself and my family flourish so beautifully. My experience helped me come out of my shell, too. I learned how to speak up and advocate for myself. Now I can teach my daughters these valuable life skills and be the best role model for them possible."