

PASADENA NOW

70 Graduate from Pasadena 'Second Chance' Charter High School

Learning Works gives young students the chance to re-boot — “it’s really, really exciting”

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[UPDATED] Pasadena’s 2021 graduation season continued as Learning Works Charter School, an educational collaboration with Homeboy Industries in Boyle Heights, held commencement ceremonies Tuesday for 70 graduates.

The school represents a second chance for young people who, for various reasons, have struggled in traditional school settings.

“This is a school for high school dropouts, kids who didn’t make it in the traditional school setting,” said Learning Works founder Dr. Mikala Rahn, as parents lined their decorated cars up along Daisy Street and Foothill Boulevard for the drive-up ceremony.

In true pandemic style, the festooned vehicles circled the small campus and as each one arrived at the school’s entrance, the graduates, in cap and gown, along with parents and friends, clambered out of the cars and onto the balloon-decorated parking lot stage for commemorative photos. Learning Works students also received a pair of new sneakers, from a donation of 244 pairs of shoes from the Assistance League of Flintridge, coordinated by Lori Rotenberg.

“They come in all shapes and sizes,” said Rahn. “Lots of teen moms, addiction issues, juvenile delinquency issues, but when they finally make it here, they really are changed humans. Their confidence is up, they know they can go on with a fresh start from this place, they can go on to college, so it’s really, really exciting.”

Rahn also pointed out that in many of the families, the young students are the family’s first high school graduates.

Father Greg Boyle, famed founder of Homeboy Industries, also told *Pasadena Now* at the ceremony, “These are all folks who have had some hiccups and some interruptions in their educational process, and they came to Learning Works, and have really been so welcomed and cherished, which has kind of transformed their lives.”

Boyle added, “So, if it’s true that the traumatized may well cause trauma, the cherished will find their way to the joy there is in cherishing themselves.”

According to the school’s website, [Public Works, Inc.](#) a nonprofit collaborative, was founded in 1998, “dedicated to working with schools, government, parents, and communities by providing services and resources to educate and inform children, youth and families.”

The collaborative effort eventually began to connect with the poorest, most disengaged youth in Pasadena Unified School District (PUSD) — dropouts. Enrolling such students back into traditional schools was difficult — too far behind in credits, trying to re-enroll mid-semester, student work schedules, girls with babies and no child care, students “aged-out” at 18 years old, discipline records, and more, according to the school’s website.

Public Works then began a dropout recovery program administered by PUSD, as the website noted, “the existing system just did not know how to re-engage, welcome or serve dropouts so we started Learning Works, a charter school where the dropout is the customer.”