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FIESTA BOWL CHARITIES

# Breaking the cycle of poverty: ICAN mission seeks to build a community for all

Fiesta Bowl Charities dedicates dollars to end vicious circle



At ICAN: Positive Programs for Youth all things are possible in the East Valley region of the Valley of the Sun. SUBMITTED PHOTO

Posted Friday, July 17, 2020 12:57 pm



ICAN is located in the heart of downtown Chandler where it all began 30 years earlier.



By **Terrance Thornton**  
Twitter: @NVNEWSMAN

The state of mind "I can't" doesn't exist at an East Valley nonprofit dedicated to showing children --- through structured after-school programs --- they most definitely can.

The focus of ICAN: Positive Programs for Youth, a Chandler-based 501(c)3 nonprofit organization, is to show all children how to be self-confident, responsible, and productive members of modern society.

Shelby Pederson, ICAN's chief executive officer, says the mission founded about 30 years ago is a vital part of the Chandler community.

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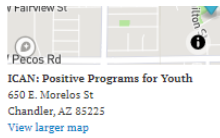
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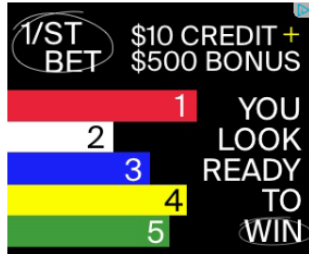
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"ICAN's mission is to provide free, comprehensive programs that empower youth to be productive, self-confident, and responsible members of our community," she said recalling the inception of the program based at 650 E. Morelos Street in the heart of Chandler.

"ICAN was founded nearly 30 years ago by Henry Salinas. Henry was a resident of downtown Chandler --- he saw gang violence taking over his community and sought to make a change. He started working with teens in the community, meeting at the park to play basketball --- talking to them about what it would take to keep them out of gangs."

What started as one man's effort to improve his community has blossomed into a foundation of love and support for the community's youth.



"Henry's time and compassion with local teens all of those years ago have grown exponentially over the years. ICAN typically serves over 2,500 youth each year --- with 500 youth a year at the after-school program and another 2,000 youth through in-school life skills training with Chandler Unified School District," Ms. Pederson explains.

But as the unfolding COVID-19 pandemic reshapes the world, Ms. Pederson contends, the ICAN attitude is prevailing.

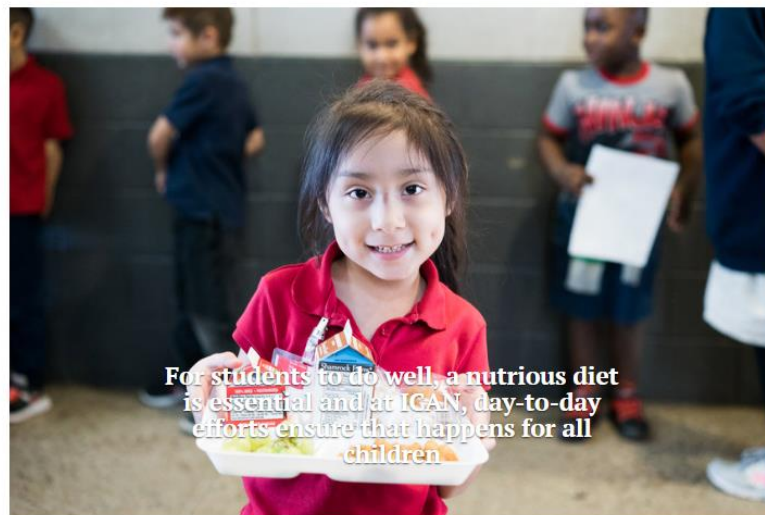
*"The COVID crisis has impacted the number of youth ICAN is serving and ICAN has remained flexible throughout the crisis to ensure we are best serving our youth and families," she explained of the current state of affairs. "ICAN is open for summer programs, with a limited number of youth attending. ICAN will remain open full-days for the duration of schools postponing in-person learning and continue to work closely with Chandler Unified School District to support youth in the community."*

--- Shelby Pederson

Ms. Pederson points out ICAN's original footprint was downtown Chandler, but the nonprofit endeavor serves children from all over the East Valley.

"ICAN serves the East Valley community, but particularly the downtown Chandler area --- where government housing, trailer parks and rundown apartments house a population that includes 30,000 youth," she said of the vicious cycle of poverty.

"ICAN's main goal is to break the cycle of poverty, creating a new pathway for future success. This goal is accomplished through our positive youth development program, which offers a holistic approach to helping youth from disadvantaged backgrounds to prevent and overcome life challenges and prepare for healthy transitions to adulthood."



### Breaking the cycle of poverty

While the cyclical nature of poverty can keep families intertwined, Ms. Pederson says through constructive efforts, that cycle can be broken. She has seen it, she says.



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