

Mary Elias



I'm privileged to be able to introduce you to our next Courage Award Recipient – Mary Elias. Mary is a senior at McClintock High School and a Peggy Payne Academy Honors student. She was nominated for this award by her counselor, Melinda Coronado.

Ms. Coronado shared that Mary is “the type of person that radiates positive energy. She is such a good spirit and everyone thinks so highly of her.” She also noted that Mary’s perseverance over hard circumstances was admirable.

When Mary was fifteen, she became the sole caregiver for her parents. Her father is immunosuppressed, and her mother has cerebral palsy, a neuromuscular disability that affects motion. Although she had helped her family for many years already, becoming a sole caretaker meant that Mary was faced with additional challenges. She undertook this new set of responsibilities while also maintaining her grades, participating in athletics and activities, and maintaining a positive outlook.

In addition, as an enrolled member of the Gila River Indian Community, Mary was well aware of the barriers and challenges that can face Native American students as they navigate their way towards higher education. Thanks to the help of her counselor, Ms. Coronado, and her Peggy Payne Academy Director, Ms. Zinke, Mary was able to enroll in classes and programs that helped her to excel and achieve her goals.

Currently, Mary is part of Maricopa Community College’s Hoop of Learning program, a high school-to-college bridge program for Native American students. The

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program is indigenous by design, based on a traditional Native American worldview of a circle, or hoop, of lifelong development. Its mission is to encourage, enable, and create conditions that empower Native American students to complete high school and transition successfully to higher education. As a Hoop member, Mary has had the opportunity to take college level courses and will enter college with over 60 credits and an Associate degree, on top of maintaining a 4.0 GPA! Mary was one of a few freshmen selected for the program and last spring, she became Hoop of Learning's first high school junior inducted into the Phi Theta Kappa College Honors Society.

Mary excels not only academically, but also on the basketball court. She is a Varsity player on the McClintock Girls' Basketball team and counts basketball as one of her very favorite activities. She also works hard to motivate her teammates, by reminding them that they can achieve in both academics and athletics. She helps tutor her teammates in different subjects and is always challenging those around her to work hard and dream big.

Due to life circumstances, Mary exhibits a grace and poise beyond her eighteen years. She tells us that she is inspired and motivated by her older sister, who helps her understand life; and her mother, who has persevered over her own challenges.

Mary's resilient spirit and positive attitude are truly inspiring. She is currently receiving a plethora of college acceptance letters and plans on majoring in animal science. We can't wait to see what she achieves next – and we are so honored to present her with a 2021 Courage Award tonight.