

## Jóvenes Adelante Graduate to Start Recycling Program

By Kate Greenaway  
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Xochitl Saavedra Landeros was still in primary school when she started dreaming of making a difference in the world. In Grade 8, she announced to her father she wanted a career and that she was determined to go to university. Her father took her at her word, and rose to the challenge by waking her up early on school-day mornings to teach her to cook, saying, "If you're going to be independent, you'll need to learn to feed yourself!" Over the next five years, she learned to cook while excelling in her studies, and won several scholarships on graduation. And her parents – a gardener and housekeeper – saved what they could.

Xochitl ("Sochi" to her friends) initially enrolled in business administration, hoping this flexible career path would open doors to something she could really sink her teeth into. She worked hard and did well, but worried about depleting her parents' resources, since her younger sister was likely university-bound as well. She also kept scanning the horizon for a better career fit and when she saw the announcement of a new program, "Renewable Energy," she knew she had found her calling. Fortunately, she discovered Jóvenes Adelante at the same time and was selected for a scholarship for the coming year. Through the Jóvenes Adelante program, Xochitl was matched with mentor James Olsen, whose support and friendship she relied on for more than four years. She also established an enduring bond with her friend and informal mentor, Jock Whitehouse.



Xochitl moved to Queretaro, adapted quickly to her new program, loved the content and achieved outstanding grades. Unfortunately, however, by the end of the second year, over half her classmates had lost interest or failed; the program -- left under-subscribed -- was forced to close. Undaunted, Xochitl successfully competed for entry into a similar program in Guadalajara, a more expensive city and even farther from home. She secured additional scholarship support through Guadalajara state government and never lost sight of her dream. In 2015, Xochitl graduated with flying colors.

Now back in San Miguel, Xochitl is turning her passion into action through the development of a multi-dimensional recycling program. In spite of working full-time to accumulate capital, she has transformed a plot in Col. San Luis Rey into a recycling depot. She has installed containers for short-term storage of glass, plastic, tin, cardboard, household appliances and electronics, as well as bins for composting of kitchen waste. Although her vision is to provide compost to families in the campo,

her first priority is economic viability, so kitchen waste will be collected for a small fee and the compost sold to nurseries in town. Agreements with scrap dealers will generate a small income.

To further ensure the viability of her business, Xochitl has invested in a small tienda that will sell low-cost, energy-saving devices and recycling supplies (worm composting systems, compostable garbage bags, home storage containers, etc.). She is putting the finishing touches on the site now and aims to open in late May. Her Facebook page “Protejamos Reciclando” is active – updates will be posted there.

Jóvenes Adelante is proud of its role in supporting Xochitl, one of several graduates who have become the next generation of Mexico’s entrepreneurs. Recruitment of mentors for this year’s intake of students is currently underway. For information about becoming a student mentor, or volunteering with or donating to Jóvenes Adelante, please see <http://www.jovenesadelante.org> or call the office at 150-0030.