

## EDUCATION

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# Matti Robi is a face behind the numbers in the 2017 report from Graduate Tacoma

BY MICHAEL SIMPSON

After she walks down the aisle with her diploma in June, Mount Tahoma High School's Matti Robi, inspired by her past, will be packing her bags for California to study health care.

"I want to help people," the 18 year-old co-valedictorian said.

Because her parents suffered from health problems that prevented them from taking care of her, Robi first lived with other family members in Los Angeles. Then, less than two years ago, she moved to her aunt and uncle's in Tacoma.

Robi said she may want to specialize in geriatrics. Her father is elderly and in a convalescent home.

"What's best for me?" she asked herself, after his health wavered.

In California, her school didn't have the advanced placement coursework she wanted.

So she looked to Tacoma, where her relatives live near Mount Tahoma High School.

Before enrolling here, she contacted her future counselor on the school website: "What classes do you offer?" she asked. "I'm moving here."

She chose Mount Tahoma because her cousin goes there and because it has the advanced placement classes that she needs — calculus, language and United States history — to get a head start in college

"I felt like I was at home," Robi said.



## I FELT LIKE I WAS AT HOME

Matti Robi, Mount Tahoma senior

Robi is one of seven foster children at Mount Tahoma who benefit from the work of Treehouse, a Seattle-based nonprofit. The organization has office hours at the school on Thursdays and Fridays.

Treehouse helps foster children such as Robi in their transition to college. This includes paying for graduation-related expenses, such as a cap and gown. The organization takes students on college tours throughout the country. During the first six months of college, Treehouse advisers check in with students, their foster parents and social workers to see if help is needed.

Pierce County has one of the highest rates of children entering foster care in the state, according to Graduate Tacoma, a nonprofit that partners with Treehouse.

Graduate Tacoma and the affiliated Foundation for Tacoma Students report on those statistics and other Tacoma education indicators in their [2017 Community Impact Report](#), released this week. The report tracks the progress of Tacoma students from preschool to college and vocational programs, and shares the data with Graduate Tacoma's 240 partners from education, nonprofit and business sectors. Those partners are working to close achievement gaps between income and racial groups, provide tutoring for students preparing to take college entrance exams and boost graduation rates, among other goals.

## **THEY ARE REALLY HELPING US PROMOTE A LEARNING CULTURE AND A COLLEGE-BOUND CULTURE**

Mount Tahoma Principal Kevin Kannier

At Mount Tahoma, the four-year graduation rate has risen from 67 percent in 2012 to 79 percent last year. Principal Kevin Kannier credits the success to the hard work of the students, faculty and nonprofits that work with the school. Graduate Tacoma meets with school counselors and staff, providing them with the data they need to help students, he added.

"They are really helping us promote a learning culture and a college-bound culture," Kannier said.

Last year, the Tacoma School District increased high school four-year graduation rates to 85 percent. That's up from 55 percent at the beginning of the decade. And with the Class of 2017 getting ready to put on their caps and gowns, Graduate Tacoma staff say there's still work to be done.

Among the goals:

- Close achievement gaps among racial and socio-economic groups
- Support more students as they transition from high school to college and careers.

Graduate Tacoma President Eric Wilson said he is proud that, between 2010 and 2016, Tacoma boosted graduation rates by more than 20 percentage points for all racial and economic groups.

But he says the Tacoma community needs to work harder to increase graduation rates for students who aren't able to finish in four years.

## **I HAVE A LOT OF MOMS IN THIS SCHOOL**

Matti Robi, Mount Tahoma senior

Robi, with a 4.0 grade point average, was accepted by the University of Washington Tacoma, University of Puget Sound, Washington State University, Pacific Lutheran University, University of Southern California and Vanderbilt University.

She chose USC in Los Angeles, so that she can be close to her mother and father. She calls her father daily to check on him.

Robi says she couldn't have been accepted by all of those colleges without her parents' support.

"My family has kept me grounded," she said.

In addition to their support, Robi had help from school counselors, teachers and local nonprofits. They helped her earn a \$60,000-plus scholarship for low-income students who rank in the top 5 percent to 10 percent of their class and who have overcome difficult personal experiences.

"I have a lot of moms in this school," Robi said.

Just as Robi has relied on the help of others, she gives back as part of her school's community service class and as a tutor who helps freshmen with homework.

She realizes her life may change as she enters college. But Robi says she is heading there with an open heart.

**SHORT VIDEO: MEET MATI ROBI, MT. TAHOMA HIGH SCHOOL**

<http://www.thenewstribune.com/news/local/education/article147431204.html>