

20 UNDER 40 PEOPLE TO WATCH: Abel Guzman

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Abel Guzman, 33, is the executive director of rural initiatives at Bakersfield College.

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Education is a key to success.

Before becoming executive director of rural initiatives at Bakersfield College, Abel Guzman, a Delano native, was a part of Youth 2 Leaders, a nonprofit organization dedicated to ensuring next generation students have the opportunity to go to college.

“We helped redefine the mission — to unlock the power of higher education. How do we get them in and out of college? We tooled up students to prepare them for college, kind of being their older brother and sister to guide them through this process,” he said.

Guzman went to UC Santa Barbara to study political science. While there, Guzman knew he was meant to serve the education world. After being a part of an outreach event to introduce high school students to the UCSB campus, he said he felt inspired and wanted to bring outreach programs to Kern County.

“Something about home called me back and working with this community is starting to show why I had to come back,” he said.

Guzman was able to work at Cal State Bakersfield for four years as an adviser. He also obtained his master’s degree in public administration, which opened up new opportunities for his career.

He got his start working as a program manager for adult education at Bakersfield College.

“The key to success is education, especially for first generation, low-income students. Our Kern County community can’t really progress. To me, education is everything,” he said.

Guzman explained communities that surround Kern County have a small number of college degree attainment, and he wanted to change that.

“When I look at these communities, I want to start with rural initiatives. If we get more high school students and adults connected, we’ll get our percentage up. My goal is to get every community in Kern County in the double digit of degree attainment,” he said.

As director of rural initiatives, Guzman visits secondary schools in Delano, Arvin, Shafter, Wasco, Lamont and more to introduce higher education earlier on to students.

Guzman lives his life by staying busy — a saying his father instilled in his life.

“There’s always something to do. I think I apply that in my day-to-day work. If you’re not busy helping others, stay busy doing something to help yourself,” he said. “It makes life more fulfilling for sure.”