

Good morning everyone. Mayor Giles thank you for another warm welcome. I always know that if I'm in Mesa, it's for something that will set an example for others to follow, something that addresses a real challenge faced by this community, and that's no different today.

The East Valley Institute of Technology has set the gold standard when it comes to providing alternative pathways for students who, for whatever reason, aren't pursuing a traditional college education, something that has become increasingly common over the last few years.

This is evidenced by EVIT's soaring enrollment – with close to six thousand students, enrollment has nearly doubled since 2019. And at each turn, Dr. Wilson and the entire team here has been ready to meet the changing needs of their students. Which brings us to why we are here today.

Today, we are celebrating yet another way EVIT will be addressing a unique need in this community: providing housing to vulnerable Arizonans who have aged out of the foster care system while making sure they are on the path to a brighter future.

Access to housing has been a barrier for too many, but thanks to HopeTech, the students who will live here will be able to continue their education with a safe place to rest their heads at night. As a social worker, I cannot overstate just how important that is.

In fact, my first job out of college as a social worker was working with homeless youth in Phoenix, much like the ones who will be served by this program.

The kids I worked with had no family support, and it was hard for them to think of any kind of future because they were simply struggling to survive. We've come a long way in terms of support and services for youth who are aging out of the foster care system, but it's still not enough.

That's why I'm so excited about what EVIT is piloting here with HopeTech. Having a stable space to call their own will not only provide a sense of security and empower these students, making them better equipped to handle the ups and downs that often come with being a student, it will also allow them to focus on planning for their futures and gaining the skills they'll need to be successful.

HopeTech is designed to help program participants better themselves and continue to develop into their full potential. Residents will be required to work toward a high school diploma or GED if they haven't received one already, enroll in an EVIT program, and work a part-time job. I know – that sounds like a lot – but this experience will give these students a leg up when they enter the workforce full-time.

They'll be better prepared for the realities of being an adult and more resilient to the challenges that come with it.

When finished, this will be so much more than just a building. For the students who live here, it will be a place to call home, it will be a place to gather with friends, a place for them to grow, it will be ***theirs***.

When I talk about taking a holistic approach to building an Arizona for everyone, this is exactly what I mean. I hope that other schools will see the innovative way EVIT is tackling this challenge and follow in your footsteps.

Dr. Wilson, Dr. Doolen, and the rest of the EVIT team who helped make this happen, congratulations on this new chapter. I am so encouraged by the efforts being made here to meaningfully support Arizona's students and I'm excited to see what else is to come.

Mayor Giles, I know your leadership is critical to the success we've seen happen here, so thank you for your continued commitment to creating an Arizona for everyone.

Congratulations to everyone and thank you