



**YOUTH
SPEAK!
COLLECTIVE**

**BUILDING A FUTURE
FOR YOUTH BY YOUTH**

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Dear Friend,

Facing a disastrous 50% high school drop out rate, many of Pacoima's youth have limited opportunities to graduate from high school and succeed. Located in the northeast San Fernando Valley, Pacoima, Youth Speak Collective's (YSC) primary target neighborhood, is historically one of the poorest and most violent districts in Los Angeles County. In 2005, YSC directors discovered that many community activities and programs targeting at-risk youth failed to integrate youth in the development of programs meant to serve them. A 501 (c)(3) non-profit organization, Youth Speak Collective, is a youth-driven initiative, whose mission is to empower low-income families in the northeast San Fernando Valley with the skills necessary to pursue higher education and create strong communities.

Youth Speak Collective identified Pacoima's young population as an important community asset that, if empowered, can be a catalyst to revitalize the neighborhood for working families living there. Each YSC program is designed and implemented by a council of young leaders, which the YSC staff facilitates. YSC targets youth who are at-risk for joining gangs, have special academic or behavioral needs, or attend low-performing schools. Our primary goals are to reduce teen violence, achieve 100% high school graduation rate, and revitalize the community through youth-driven community initiatives.

This past February, LA84 Foundation and Nike Partnership built a new Futsal court for **Futbolito Pacoima** valued at \$250,000. **Futbolito Pacoima** was created to meet the overwhelming demand for a popular after school soccer program that focuses on serving youth at risk for gang involvement. YSC's success with programs like **Futbolito Pacoima** has been achieved through its ability to reach at-risk youth in gang areas and establish 'street credit', an important factor in any youth development initiative.



Due to the weakened economy, a local high school announced this spring that they would make large budget cuts and cancel summer school. Canceling the summer session would have left hundreds of students with no alternative resources for making up academic deficiencies and meeting their educational goals. Students would have also found themselves with hours of unsupervised free time in a precarious social environment where gangs and drugs are prevalent.

Speak Up, a YSC youth empowerment program, petitioned the school against the cut by collecting hundreds of student signatures. As a result, hundreds of students were able to take advantage of summer school. Through his experience with **Speak Up**, Armando Esparza, age 19, reveals, *“I am starting to see the power of my positive actions. With **Speak Up** I am able to create solutions to help my peers have the opportunity to reach their dreams”*. Armando now attends Los Angeles Valley College where he hopes to transfer to UC Berkeley and study Political Science and eventually attend law school.



At YSC’s **Creative Technology Center**, Hector, age 13 found a safe environment to pursue his interest in the arts. Currently, he is finishing up his probation after being arrested for fighting and using illegal drugs with his peers. He writes, *“I first came to the **Creative Technology Center** to do my homework. I started taking the mural and film classes to express my feelings through art instead of physically. I found a place where I learned how to make films and now I edit my own skating videos, which I have always wanted to do! I am a very intelligent 8th grader and now I am getting A’s instead of F’s. After coming to Youth Speak Collective, I see what is possible for me.”*

Youth Speak Collective also engages the families of Pacoima through programming focused on healthy living through nutrition, exercise, and community beautification. Our youth council created **Project Youth Green** in 2007, a four-acre community revitalization project, which now provides 250 family members with access to fresh fruits and vegetables, physical exercise programming and a safe green space that the whole neighborhood can enjoy.

Youth Speak Collective’s dream for 2010 is to expand our dynamic programs by doubling the number of youth we are able to serve. Contributions received from our annual support letter provide crucial support for YSC programs throughout the year. We greatly appreciate any contribution and would like to express our deepest gratitude for your support and consideration. An envelope and donation pledge card are included with this letter. Donations can also be made online at: www.youthspeakcollective.org.



On behalf of the entire Youth Speak Collective Team, we wish you and your family a happy holiday season.

David Kietzman *Whitney Kasserman*

David Kietzman
Executive Director

Whitney Kasserman
Director of Program Development

Giving to Youth Speak Collective is easy!

- ✓ Write a check or make a quarterly pledge by mailing in the enclosed envelope today.
- ✓ Pay online at www.youthspeakcollective.org by clicking the “Donate Now” button, accessing our secure online service.
- ✓ Call us to find out other ways your business or organization can contribute to YSC.