

**The Paint Brush is Mightier than the Sword**

While CRA/LA takes pride in its ability to strategically leverage its funds to bring communities much needed infrastructure enhancements, commercial/retail space and affordable housing, CRA/LA also invests in people.

Pacoima’s Youth Speak an initiative providing youth in low-income communities in the northeast San Fernando Valley with the skills necessary to pursue higher education and create strong communities. YSC provides youth empowerment, education, arts and recreation programs to 500 at-risk youth per day, ages 11 to 19, in schools, parks, low-income housing developments and community centers. What is truly unique about YSC is that it addresses community needs using a "youth-driven" model, which has the teens work as the planners and stakeholders for all the programs. YSC is a four-year-old non-profit in Pacoima that has accomplished some amazing things in just a short time period such as implementing a community newspaper, a four-acre community garden, a “futbolito” athletic league, college preparatory classes, and art and design classes, which all came from the ideas and needs of young people in Pacoima.



The CRA/LA East Valley team strives to build strong partnerships with local nonprofits to implement our strategic goal of enhancing cultural vitality in our neighborhoods. After participating in Community Service Days and attending YSCs art and design events, the East Valley team saw first hand how YSC programs have helped positively transform the community by giving these youth a voice of their own. CRA/LA and YSC share the same goals – to make our neighborhoods a better place to live – but we use different tools. We decided to collaborate using the “Unheard Voices” art exhibit as our mutual tool.

The “Unheard Voices” art exhibit is a youth art show that reflects the thoughts, images and ideas of Latino youth living in at-risk communities in the northeast San Fernando Valley. This past summer, the young YSC artists developed pieces in honor of Latino Heritage Month. In early October, the CRA/LA hosted an art reception for the artists and more than 80 community members from throughout the Pacoima/Panorama City Project Area attended. Channel 35 interviewed the artists and Councilman Richard Alarcón’s office awarded each a certificate of appreciation.

"Art is important in my life, cuz it keeps me out of trouble. Painting keeps me open minded and helps me focus on the positive things in life. If Youth Speak Collective programs weren't here I would be creating chaos and not care as much about my life and goals." - Briana Gonzalez, age 17, San Fernando High School

The CRA/LA partnership with YSC has provided much-needed supplies and a venue for youth to create and display their artwork. In addition to the art exhibit, this partnership will allow the YSC artists to visit local museums and galleries and take a master class with an established artist. The youth will also tour the NoHo Arts District to see how many art forms are made and to witness how the arts are flourishing in the East Valley. It is also a way to unite two of the CRA/LA's project areas.

"Art and youth development programs in general are so important because they empower the youth to make a positive change in their community and in their lives. They are motivated, organized and passionately creating art and that is why these programs are vital. This partnership with CRA/LA is important because it allows Youth Speak to partner with a passionate group of people so that we can both help in the development of our communities." -David Kietzman, YSC Executive Director

If you would like to see how one group is inspiring the creativity in our East Valley Youth, come visit our office art gallery to see the works of YSC students in the "Unheard Voices" exhibit running until January 2010. For more information on YSC and to get involved, visit: [www.youthspeakcollective.org](http://www.youthspeakcollective.org)