



Young Warriors

Posted By Luis J. Rodriguez on January 19, 2011

This past Saturday, the Young Warriors youth empowerment project of Tia Chucha's Centro Cultural, held a community ceremony to honor a number of San Fernando High School probation, gang youth, and other high risk students who took part in a ten-week self-discovery, self-healing workshops held from October to December of 2010.

Run by YW founder Mayra Zaragoza, in collaboration with Tia Chucha's, Youth Speak Collective, the Los Angeles Unified School District, and the Los Angeles County Probation Department, these workshops were created to help young people stay in school, improve their grades and attendance, and consider a life free of violence and drugs.

The culmination was held at the Pacoima Community Center in the Northeast San Fernando Valley and involved the students as well as their parents (who were also taking part in a separate dialogue during part of the day). Each young person also received a certificate of completion and a Young Warriors T-shirt. Other guests from various community and school-based organizations also attended. We were also honored to have Huitzi and Mextii, two Mexika (so-called Aztec) dancers come to teach about the indigenous cosmology of the Mexika/Maya peoples and to perform a number of sacred dances with members of their danza group.

The youth also got to share their passions and ambitions. One 15-year-old participant, who has taken part in a number of Tia Chucha's music, dance, and photography workshops, shared the amazing photos she's taken with the other young people. The other youth shared their own concerns and issues, which the Young Warriors workshops helped by opening up a safe and guiding space for them.

I thank all the organizations involved as well as the youth and parents. I particularly want to thank Mayra Zaragoza for working hard to make this happen, as well as Cristina Patricio and Stephanie Marron of San Fernando High School, and Mayra Esparza of Youth Speak Collective, for doing all they could to assist the process. We hope to continue these kinds of workshops for the most troubled students at San Fernando High School as well as other high schools in the Northeast San Fernando Valley.

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I'm Luis J. Rodriguez, the author of *Always Running: La Vida Loca, Gang Days in L.A.* and several other books in short fiction, children's literature, nonfiction, and poetry. On my web log I'll be posting all the latest news concerning my work as a writer, along with news and opinions on the many political, social, spiritual and cultural activities that I find interesting.

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