

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **Inspiring High School Student Representing the Future Leaders of Los Angeles will receive Achievement Award during Gala Celebration**

*- For Five Years, Youth Speak Collective  
Has been building futures "For Youth and by Youth" -*

**Los Angeles, (August 25, 2011)** — Youth Speak Collective (YSC), the Pacoima-based non-profit organization will celebrate five years of inspiring youth to excel through academics, creative expression and leadership development with a Gala on Saturday, September 24 at 7 p.m. The "Imagine. Inspire. Ignite: Celebrating 5 Years of Youth-led Action" Gala Celebration will recognize one of the 2011 honorees Agustin Flores, who serves as a model and inspiration to others throughout the Northeast San Fernando Valley. *"Agustin will be receiving this award alongside other civic leaders and community partners,"* said David Kietzman, YSC Executive Director.

Agustin's story illustrates how YSC participants are part of the team to help design innovative work and implement the diverse range of programs that provide crucial academic and life opportunities to at-risk youth living in Pacoima. A native of Guadalajara, Mexico, Agustin Flores is an 18-year-old high school senior who had his eyes opened to a whole new world when he participated in the "Speak Up" leadership group from Youth Speak Collective (YSC). Since attending the YSC leadership program he has challenged himself to increase his involvement with issues concerning his own community and community action groups.

One of the issues he has made his business is the Dream Act, a bill allowing undocumented immigrants to pay in-state tuition. With his drive and determination, he is taking the time to educate local youth to get involved in town halls and phone bank supporting this issue. Just last year, he was leading a petition to local school officials to bring back some of the teachers at San Fernando high school who received pink slips. Agustin is a young leader willing to learn and speak out on behalf of his community. He also spends some of his weekends as an active volunteer with two main organizations Meet Each Need with Dignity (MEND) and Pacoima Beautiful. *"I'm learning skills and gaining knowledge at a local level and my goal is to become an influential social justice advocate one day,"* he says, adding that he would like to continue learning a wide range of skills, such as community development so he can be able to return and give back to the schools he grew up in.

*"It's important to encourage our young people like Agustin to develop leadership skills,"* said Mayra Esparza, Youth Services Coordinator of Youth Speak Collective. *"At YSC, we provide teens throughout the San Fernando Valley, with creative, high-quality programs that utilize their intellect and talent, build their academic skills, and strengthen their investment in their own communities. Agustin has made a tremendous impact in his school and community. He personified the next generation of leaders in Los Angeles."*

Youth Speak Collective is a youth-driven organization that works in partnership with high schools, businesses and founded on the idea that all young people can succeed if provided with the right opportunities. YSC follow a "for youth, by youth" philosophy in which young people are empowered to help design and implement its programs.

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YSC focuses on transforming the physical and economic neighborhoods in the Northeast San Fernando Valley. Some of the Youth Speak Collective's signature programs include Academic Support Services, Youth Development and Creative Expression programs, Project Youth Green (PYG) and Futbolito Pacoima. Currently, YSC serves approximately 500 youth a day and over 3,000 students last year through school based and community centered events.

According to the last U.S. Census, sixty-nine percent of households in Pacoima are home to children living below the federal poverty threshold. Pacoima has high levels of gang violence, a large youth population and is historically one of the most economically disadvantaged and violent districts in the City of Los Angeles. Many of Pacoima's youth have limited opportunities to graduate from high school with only 52% of students graduating local high schools.

### **Youth Speak Collective:**

Founded in 2006 by a handful of high school students and the current Executive Director, YSC is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization committed to empowering at-risk youth and their families with the skills necessary to pursue higher education and create strong communities. YSC annually helps more than 3,000 individuals, including some of the most disadvantaged youth and families in the Northeast San Fernando Valley. The organization provides a broad spectrum of integrated direct services designed to strengthen families, build self-sufficiency and guide them towards productive futures.

For more information, please visit the web site at: [www.youthspeakcollective.org](http://www.youthspeakcollective.org)

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