



# **WHERE I'M FROM**

## **VOICES FROM EAST AUSTIN YOUTH**

**East Austin College Prep Academy**

**GRADE 6**

**East Austin, Texas**

**A service-learning project with the National Council of La Raza (NCLR)  
and What Kids Can Do, Inc. (WKCD)**

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# ABOUT THIS PROJECT

In 2008, the Education component of the National Council of La Raza (NCLR) launched a multi-year service-learning initiative in three Affiliate charter middle schools: Lighthouse Community Charter School in Oakland, California; Camino Nuevo Charter Academy in Los Angeles, California; and East Austin College Prep Academy in Austin, Texas.

Five principles guide the initiative:

- Reflecting and honoring the values of Latino communities and the traditions in those communities through culturally competent service-learning programs
- Approaching the service element of service-learning through direct ties in the community
- Reinforcing high standards and rigorous learning
- Engaging youth in the service-learning planning process to emphasize their voice
- Addressing community issues through participation in the solution to challenging issues that many Latino students commonly face

Drawing upon the evidence-based success of middle school service-learning programs nationwide, these schools are developing their own programs and becoming models for the broader NCLR School Network. During the pilot phase, NCLR has helped teachers develop a culture of service-learning, cultivate a cadre of youth advocates, and create a space for the Latino voice. It is also strengthening students' skills in leadership and critical thinking and students' understanding of issues affecting their community.

In the fall of 2009, NCLR partnered with What Kids Can Do, Inc. (WKCD) to design and implement a Youth Voice Institute at each school. These workshops gave student leaders the opportunity to use language arts, literacy, and writing activities to imagine a better world. As they found their voices, ideas for projects and concepts of the service-learning process came to life.

The students participating in this program are leaders at their school. In turn, they will serve as youth trainers, teaching other students and instructors how to use language arts and literacy to imagine a healthy community.

We are grateful to the participating schools for the unending support they gave and continue to give their students. These students love their communities and have given voice to their image of the future.

*Sarah DeCamps, NCLR Service-Learning Project Coordinator*  
*Abe Louise Young, WKCD Writing Facilitator*  
*Barbara Cervone, WKCD President*



# Christian Gomez

## Where I Am From

I am from the land where people dance  
and sing, from the tasty food of spices and sweets.  
Where people tell me,  
*Don't be afraid  
to stand up!*

I remember when I was five, playing with my friends  
saying "*No me agaras*"  
and singing "*Ala bibora bibora de la mar  
de la mar por aque puede pasar...*"  
to the sad things  
like my grandfather dying on Christmas

I am from the land where people dress  
with colorful clothing  
and the sweet scent of my mom  
making *arroz con leche*...  
milky and cinnamon tastes  
and the sound of my mom stirring the milk  
to get the right taste.

\*

Let me tell you about *arroz con leche*.  
I like this dish because when the *arroz con leche*  
is served on a beautiful brown cup  
like the trunk of a tree, it fills the air  
with a sweet scent of milk.  
The rice floating in the milk like a river  
flowing and the cinnamon stick poking out of the cup.  
The milk is like a white blanket sitting on the top.  
When I get the spoonful of rice I let it flow  
right into my mouth,  
filling me with tunes of sweet flavors.  
The rice touches my tongue sweetly  
and the milk flows in my mouth.  
This is why this dish is my favorite dish.



# Donjae Kenyon Harden

## The Family I Am From

I am from the Hardens family  
I am from the “no eyes closed”  
I see footballs, basketballs, coffee, and cereal  
My family is made of confidence  
I see colleges all around my neighborhood  
Everyone sees success in my family  
I see pizza, lasagna, *crème brulee*, bacon, pork chops, sweet potatoes,  
cereal, pasta, ribs, brisket, mac and cheese, and milk

I like people who don't fight.  
I don't like people who like to fight.  
We say thank you, excuse me, you're welcome, hi,  
no ma'am, no sir in my family  
I see football, soccer, hockey, golf, and tennis  
I see English, Spanish, French, Mexican,  
and Canadian people in my neighborhood  
I see restaurants, houses, grass,  
and gas stations on my way home  
I see food, music, microwaves

I am from intelligence  
I support the Philadelphia Eagles  
I am from the Hardens family  
and I am from Austin, Texas



# Heaven Leigh Cook

## I Love My Earth

I am from the Lord  
that's important to me  
I am from the Earth  
no one is else like me

I'm from *Behave and Go play*  
I'm from the Texas and the U.S.A.  
I'm from World War II in sorrows that have come  
I'm from the World Trade Center as the people fell from the  
building

I am from Lisa Castille  
who brought me  
I am from the happy, I am from the sad  
I am from the world that should be filled with peace

I am the songs  
that joyful people sing  
I am the dances  
that have a nice soft beat

I am the melodies  
of every song to sing  
I am the sun—however else will we see?  
I am the sorrows and the willowing that has come

I am like no ordinary people  
I am me  
I am my flower bed  
that brings me sleep

I am from my two dogs who bring  
much joy to me  
I am the trees that give us shade  
I am the wood that has been cut



I am the animals—without them who will sing in the morning?  
I am the covers who keep us warm  
I am the white and burnt orange  
I am the two of us trying to make a change

I am the pecan that falls during spring  
I am the wind in the cold winter nights  
I am the beautiful flowers that sprout during spring  
I am the colors that nature has to bring

## I Eat

I eat doughnuts and feel so sluggish, and my stomach starts to hurt really bad.  
I eat an artichoke and I feel alive, renewed, and energized.  
I drink root beer and I feel full and like *Uggghhh*.  
I drink water and I feel quenched and awesome.  
I eat Hot Cheetos and I feel like my stomach's on fire.  
I eat vegetables and I feel great and so healthy.

# Irie Corpus

## Where I'm From

I'm from dogs and cats  
birds and bees  
from the tree that sits  
by the backyard bench.

I'm from history,  
that I know  
and want to be  
when I'm old.

From rockets to Hot Pockets  
that I eat when I'm sad.



I'm from fire and light  
that's what makes me bright.  
From flutes to hoops  
that never stop blowing

And fun on the run  
never felt more free  
than I can be  
or that I can see.

I'm from the green grass  
that I pass while  
I'll forgive and forget  
like promises broken:

*Be there forever*

To dreams and hope  
bees and boats  
I'm from trees that I climb  
and honey that I eat.

I'm from family and friends  
that care so deeply  
from Who I Am  
not What You See

I'm from fireworks  
to elephant trunks  
that I see and hear  
from hope, love, and peace  
that fills me.  
From birds to words  
that decline me to be

Or to see who I want  
to be. From the laughs  
or the past that I see  
or that I'll be

to be tall, to see all  
that I'll see for me:  
I'm happy.



## In My Community

I'm my own person, so deep with secrets  
that no one knows.  
I feel like a never-ending track that feeds for more.  
I'm me, not three, I'm eleven,  
and almost through with all this gossip  
I'm tired of it all and don't want  
distress for my friends.  
They're all depressed.  
For all I deal with  
and all I do, I feel so through.  
I'm like a ghost wondering  
where I am.  
I want to be me again.  
Deepening for more treasure  
that I can be just one more person  
and that's me  
and I'm happy.

# Jasmine Noehmi Alcaraz

Oh, what a day!  
Oh, what a day!  
My little brother ran away.  
My trombone would not play.  
Oh, what a day!  
Oh, what a day!

I like money, you like honey  
If you give me some money,  
I'll give you some honey  
for money.

I like *mole*, the *mole* dissolves  
in my mouth, and my mouth doesn't let me  
eat any other type of food, just mole!



## ***Coctel de Camarones***

Let me tell you about the *coctel de camarones* that makes me eat it more than anything else. The ingredients are ketchup, shrimp, *salsa de valentina*, tomatoes, onions, lemons, *apasotes*, and a bowl or a glass cup. Then the lemon needs to be squished in the *coctel*. Mix the ingredients and you got it!

## **Where I'm From**

I'm from the United States  
My favorite food is *tamales*  
My mom makes the best *tamales*  
with cheese and *jalapenos*  
In my house is the sounds  
of screaming and fighting,  
crying, yelling, laughing,  
and the sound of the TV  
with *telenovelas*.  
My house smells like beans,  
soup, and *postoles*.  
My kitchen is small and old.  
I used to have a room,  
but my mom bought me a bed  
and she put it in the living room.  
At night, I'm sleeping  
in the soft, comfy bed to relax  
and when I wake up, I feel grumpy  
and mad because my dad  
wakes me up early  
and sometimes I wake up  
early early, like 5:45,  
to go to the bus to get to school.  
I feel as tired like I was sick.  
On the way to school  
I see cars, stoplights, CVS,  
my old school Harris Elementary,  
and old houses, some dogs, and  
my friends' Dads going to work.  
When I get to school  
I feel tired and I see my friends, and  
they are grumpy too. I see my teachers.

I see the principal. I see my best friend Laura.  
In the afternoon, I am feeling happy.  
My Mom makes me happy.  
My brothers make me mad.  
And sometimes my little brother  
makes me sweet.  
I play with my little brothers.  
Sometimes my brothers fight.  
Sometimes I want to go outside  
when my little brother's crying.  
I used to have a lot of dogs, but now  
I have one Chihuahua named Chavo.  
Most of all, I want to go to college  
to be a doctor or a teacher.

In my community, what I like  
is seeing some snakes  
and that most of our community is taking care.  
There are a lot of trees  
to get oxygen from.  
What I don't like  
is seeing pieces of candy wrappers  
and put out cigarettes.  
We need to clean and make  
our community better.

# Liliana Carmona

## Where I'm From

I am from sleeping  
where no one wakes up till 1  
Where pillows are soft  
and blankets are as soft as cotton

I am from cleaning  
where Clorox wipes smell so good  
Where it smells so good  
and where we run out of soap

VOICES FROM EAST AUSTIN YOUTH

I am from a loving house  
where hating is not an option  
because we get over it so fast  
and forgive and forget

I am from a younger sister of two minutes  
That loves to do what I do  
where everything is funny to her  
I am from a crazy little brother

that loves skateboarding  
where nothing is a joke  
who wants to be a fencing professional  
when he grows up

I am in love with a little brother  
that loves *Handy Manny*  
and is cute as a puppy  
and can never stop talking

I am from a baby brother  
that is three that loves Mickey Mouse  
and wears penguin shirts  
We like to keep our house calm

so there won't be no rowdiness  
and fighting in our house  
I am from Jeanette and Joel,  
two loving parents.



## **The Food in My House**

I could tell you everything that's in my refrigerator  
right now. There's water, grape juice, my brother's juice cups  
that he likes to go to sleep with, some milk, juice, lunch meat,  
some leftovers, Jello, ketchup, cheese sticks,  
a lot of sodas, Dr. Pepper, Big Red, Big Blue, Big Pineapple,  
Hawaiian Punch, Cherry Coke, Coke, and that's it.

And in my freezer is ice cream, frozen *tamales*, tomorrow's  
dinner, some biscuits, and Pizza Pockets.

Let me tell you about Pizza Pockets!  
From the warm and soft bread that feels like wet sand on a beach,  
to the bumpy cheese mushy and yellow,  
that looks like my brother's pillow!  
To the round and not-so-spicy pepperoni  
that looks like a dot on my sister's face,  
and all of it together tastes like a *fiesta* in my mouth!

# Thelma Manzano

## Where I Am From

I come from my parents,  
Juan and Rosalia.  
I come from my house  
surrounded by trees  
on Lyons Road.  
I come from playing soccer.  
I come from a good friendly family.

I come from where we  
get together on weekends,  
holidays or birthdays.  
We make something to eat  
like *tamales*, *posole*,  
*carne asada*, and strawberry pie.  
I come from where we go to church  
at Santa Julia  
and we bring a candle  
to San Juan de los Lagos  
every time She makes us a favor.

I come from where we like to be  
all together as a big family  
and when we do,  
I take care of my little cousin,  
Adriana. She will be two  
in *enero*, in January.

I come from a blue room  
with a big window.  
I come from a Spanish-speaking house.  
I come from a tradition  
that we will have our *quinceanera*  
if we can. I want my *quinceanera* dress  
to be white and red.  
I come from where we are  
laughing and being happy.

## **My Food**

When I eat *arroz con leche*, I feel very good.  
It tastes like something hot is in my mouth  
and at the same time it tastes crunchy.

If I eat an orange I feel very hyper.  
My mouth feels juicy.  
Sometimes the corners of my mouth  
feel very strange.

When I eat fast food, it tastes good  
but by the end I feel too full.

# **Valerie Minerva Flores**

## **Austin**

I am from a place where people roam  
I am from peace and love  
I am from food stands on corners  
Where animals walk the streets day and night  
Where the smell of *comida* comes from kitchens  
Where violence lurks  
Where the pheasants trudge and beg  
Where we argue and fight  
Where everything's in sight

Where birds and bees seek war  
Where flowers beautify the lawn  
And the grass is as green as algae  
Where the old *chilé* plant rots in the back  
Where neighbors are so grouchy  
Where people's lives are taken  
And restored souls are free  
The neighborhood smells crowded,  
earthy, smoky...alive  
Where my dirty clothes clutter my room  
Where my three cats pack in my bed  
And claw at me when I toss and turn  
Where sirens drag the town  
I am from Janie and John, and a full house  
Where my siblings argue and bring back peace  
Where my parents give us frights  
Where driving around town to see my dad is exhausting  
Where cries and sighs begin  
Where smiles and laughs dig in  
Doors slam and horns honk  
Where sticking things under my bed  
Is a routine (See that moldy food?)  
And hiding stuff seems to bring me glee...  
Where eating out is so me  
And where my town seems to be.  
Texas.

## ***Caldo***

Let me tell you about *caldo*.  
*Caldo* is a stew for both me and you.  
It is shared among my family,  
and consists of vegetables, meat, and soup.  
It's served beautifully arranged  
with a beverage of choice  
and a side of lemon.  
It has a spice and vegetable smell.  
It lures the family in.  
Once my family gets acquainted  
they always go back for more.  
Sometimes the *caldo* makes me soar.  
I feel high above the trees.  
I'm so glad there's not any fees.

The *caldo* has a feeling.  
It makes me feel like I am surrounded  
by loved ones. I appreciate  
what I have and take a moment  
to realize it.

Love, Passion, Sense, Knowledge, Care, Nurture, Health, Life!

When I'm done I look at my family  
and realize that they all look so happy and satisfied.  
That is what surrounds me.  
*Caldo...*





## East Austin College Prep Academy

East Austin College Prep Academy aims to serve as a model middle school that successfully prepares all students, regardless of economic background, for a rigorous high school curriculum, graduation, and, ultimately, a successful college experience and career. The Academy accepted its first class of 90 sixth graders in 2009, and will open its seventh and eighth grade campuses in 2010 and 2011. It is located in the eastern part of Austin, Texas—an area of the city with a high concentration of minority and low-income families. By providing a balanced, comprehensive program, the school also nurtures visual and performing arts and showcases the tremendous talent of students whose abilities are often overlooked. It is part of Southwest Key Programs.

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## National Council of La Raza (NCLR)

The National Council of La Raza (NCLR)—the largest national Hispanic civil rights and advocacy organization in the United States—works to improve opportunities for Hispanic Americans. Through its network of nearly 300 affiliated community-based organizations, NCLR reaches millions of Hispanics each year in 41 states, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia. In the summer of 2009, with support from State Farm Insurance, NCLR launched a service-learning project for middle schools in its School Network.

### Contact:

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## What Kids Can Do, Inc. (WKCD)

What Kids Can Do, Inc. (WKCD) started in 2001 to make public the voices and views of adolescents. On its website, WKCD documents young people's lives, learning, and partnerships with adults both in and outside school. WKCD also collaborates with students and educators around the world on books, photography projects, curricula, and research to expand current views on what constitutes challenging learning and achievement.

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