



# DO YOU SEE ME?

VOICES FROM LOS ANGELES YOUTH

CAMINO NUEVO CHARTER ACADEMY

GRADE 8

LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

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

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## Acknowledgments

### **CAMINO NUEVO CHARTER ACADEMY (HARVARD K-8 CAMPUS) FACULTY**

Heather McManus, Assistant Principal  
Chelsea Griswold, Teacher

### **COVER PHOTOS**

Krissbeth Granados, Estefany Mendez, Naomi Peña, Kevin Sanchez  
Camino Nuevo Charter Academy (Harvard K-8 Campus) students

### **DESIGN AND LAYOUT**

Barbara Cervone, 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*



# ALBERT ISAAC GALDAMEZ

## Do You See Me?

I am not rich or poor, but I do live  
in a place where we care for one another.

I am not silent.  
I am from where I have to be loud to be heard.

I am not Mexican, though I speak Spanish.  
I am Salvadorean.

I am not a gang member but I get caught  
because I'm in the wrong place at the wrong time.

I am not a gorilla, but I do like gorillas.  
I am not an alien.  
I am not the father of a pregnant lady.  
I am not invisible.  
I am not a JC Penny-card stealer.

I am not a weirdo.  
I am not a nerd.  
I am not FAT ALBERT.  
I am not what you think I am.  
I am not your friend, I am your buddy.  
I am not your worker. I am my own worker.  
I am not phat.

I am from a place where you respect to be respected.  
I am a person who learns from cuts and bruises to the point where I control myself.  
I am from video games that range from "T" for Teen to  
"M" for Mature

I am a boy who was planned, not just happened  
I am a person who, if you give him a chance, he can show you  
what he is made out of.



I am from *Konichiwa!* to *Como estas?*  
and *What do you want?*  
I am from my own perspective, which is open-minded  
I am from light to dark and cheese to milk  
I am from the truth to the lie of life.

## I See...

Many people in media only focus on what being cool or in fashion is. I saw a show produced by CNN called "Latino in America." The show is about Latinos in America and what they face. The only teenager that they portrayed was bad and in gangs. This makes me feel bad, because not all Latino teenagers are like that. People who don't live around Latino teenagers may get a bad example, because they only portrayed a bad one. I don't like this, because people need to know the truths, not the stereotypes.

(Other experiences of discrimination I've experienced are...)

When I went to El Salvador and we were buying something, the guy said "\$2.00." When I said, "Okay," they knew I wasn't from around there, and they raised the price to \$5.00!

Also, in America, there was a little Indian girl who said I was Mexican because I speak Spanish. That's a kind of ignorance. Being ignorant can lead people to think that you are racist, because you are not understanding what's around you.

## The America I Want Is

Equal, where people are treated like brothers and sisters  
Has good influences and positive role models that lead other people into becoming what they want to be  
Has happy people with laughter  
Has peace, where you hear kids playing outside without having any worry  
Has non-violence, where you don't hear gunshots or the sirens of police cars  
Is respectful, toward people of other religions and opinions  
Has helping hands, if someone falls down we help them get up  
Has people who don't discriminate against others,  
people who listen, and people who have big imaginations

## RESPECT

Redo  
Escape  
Support  
Perspective  
Enter  
Create  
Talent

# ELIZABETH TAMAYO

## You Don't Know Me Until Now

I am not American.  
I am from a Sinalueñse mother and a Yucateco father  
that came together no matter the critiques of them.

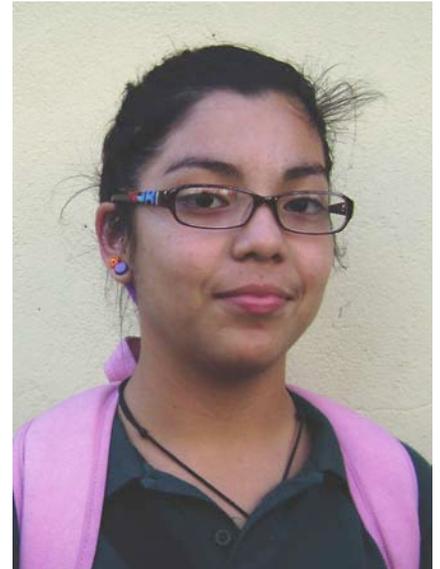
I am not a gangster.  
I won't smoke a blunt even if my friends pressure me to do it.

I am not a lunatic.  
I am a creative, random girl who doesn't care what other people  
think.

I am not an alien, although my initials are E.T.  
I am not a shoplifter,  
my Mom pays for everything I buy.

I am not a quiet person.  
I might be loud, but I also have a heart that cares for my family.

I am not a *TAMALERA* or a *tamalera* junior.  
I am not the daughter of *El Lechero*.  
I might not have the looks of my parents, but I have their charisma.



I am not going to be a high school dropout,  
Sometimes white people think that if your parents aren't educated,  
you won't have the support to get educated. You hear that in the news  
a lot, that it's Latinos who drop out. But it's not only Latinos,  
it's worldwide.

My sister is not pregnant or psycho, she has overcome  
all those very hurtful rumors.

I am not stupid, I am full of potential  
that sometimes I don't show for everybody to see.

I am not a text freak,  
I take advantage of the new technology.

I am not a bully, even though I've been suspended.  
I am not a regret to my family  
I am not a troublemaker.  
I am proud of being who I am.

I might be a Mexican girl but I have a capacity that you will never know.  
I am from a hardworking family  
that never gives up till they succeed.

My dad is from a different religion and culture than my Mom.  
He is Mayan and they were raised in *el rancho*.  
He has *historias and creyancas*, rituals that my Mom doesn't believe in.  
I don't know my Mom's culture but I know  
that they are different. My Mom was raised in the house.  
My Grandmother accused my father of being *porosero*,  
with no life, and nothing to offer my mom.  
But they got together anyway and they are still together.

My mom has had fifteen surgeries in her right leg,  
and she suffers all that pain while she's working.  
She has to be eight hours standing at Ralph's Grocery.  
She has suffered all those cuts in her hands from work.  
She likes things to be very clean and organized.  
She has gone through a lot, yet she is happy and keeps her spirits up.

My dad is a *hornalero*, sometimes he waits for work  
at Home Depot as a painter. He's working right now.  
It doesn't matter for him if he has to stay overtime  
or miss one of my events.

If he has to miss an event of mine, he talks to me and he tells me he is sorry he can't go, but he knows I can do it.  
My dad's father left him, and he was rejected by his family.  
He came here when he was thirteen and he had to work for his food and his roof.

He wasn't with his family. The amazing thing is that he does not have hatred or bitterness toward them and he is really funny.

I could make a book out of all the things I've suffered.  
I've suffered domestic violence, foster care, my sister's drug addiction, suicidal temptations and sexual abuse in my family (but not to me.)

I am still happy, strong, brave, creative, and I am alive.  
I am not a fake or weak leader.  
Even though all these things have happened, I don't use them as excuses.

I want to become three things: a *fashionista*, an architect, and a lawyer.  
I want to be someone important who fights for rights.  
I still do what I have to do.  
I am a unique girl that will do daring things  
but I won't ride a roller coaster because I don't enjoy the ride.

I am from the mother and father that fought  
to make our family a loving family.  
I am proud of who I am.

# MARIO ALVARADO

## Do You See Me?

I am not a worker who works at a simple convenience store.  
I am an intelligent student who plans to go to college.  
I am not a Mexican.  
I am Salvadorean.  
I am not a nerd or geek.  
I am smart.  
I am not a gang banger who robs houses.  
I am a kind and caring person to everybody.  
I am not a rich person just because I'm living in America.  
I am from a loving family who, although it has very little, gives a lot back.  
I am not fat, but I am big-boned.  
I am not an angry person.  
I am a great friend who helps out his friends no matter what.  
I am not a person who knows a criminal.  
I am debater who doesn't let arguments go that easily.  
I am not my father, my brother, my sister, or my grandmother.  
I am a problem-solver.

## The America I Want

The America  
I want is a place  
where anyone can feel safe.

A place where  
there are no divisions between people.

Somewhere that has equality,  
a place anyone can call home.

Where the government isn't a conspiracy,  
where there *is* no conspiracy,  
where the government works for the people and by the people,  
and where they tell no lies to the country.



Someplace where there's peace and love,  
a place with no violence, no poverty,  
no homelessness, no racism,  
no discrimination, no social class, and no drugs.

A place where money has value,  
where we aren't in debt  
for trillions of dollars.

Somewhere the law is enforced and there is no injustice.

A place where the economy  
isn't bad and the Great Depression is history.

A place where someone sets foot here and can say,  
"This is a true country."

# GELSEY BRIDGET PADILLA

## 100% Latina

I am not from the white race, even though my father has green eyes  
and I have freckles. I am a proud Hispanic.  
My name is combined from different cultures,  
but I am 100% Latina and proud of it.

I am from the family gatherings every week.  
I am the last person laughing at the table, because I barely got the joke.  
I am from the dad who cracks jokes  
about almost anything, and the mom who is neat and organized.

I am not a silent person, I am not a tomboy, and I am not dumb.  
I am from the community with graffiti and hobos on the street.  
I am from the bluntness spinning around in my house.

I am from different music in every room  
bursting through the speakers and out the windows and doors.  
In my sister's room you hear Mariah Carey, in my brother's room  
you hear Reggaeton, in my room you hear whatever my mood is,  
and my parents bust out the *Rancheras*.

I am a unique, fun, random and loving girl.  
I am from where your actions are *karma*.  
I have an independent spirit.  
I am from the family that sticks together no matter what.  
I won't be a high school dropout.  
I'm not a trouble maker,  
I am just at the wrong place  
at the wrong time.  
I am person who does not trust easily,  
it takes time to gain my trust.

I'm adorkable.  
I am from those people who have been through so much,  
and yet you always see a smile on their face.  
I am not a mistake for my *familia*.

My parents started working when they were twelve.  
My mom worked at a gummy worm factory in Mexico.  
My Dad drove a taxi in *Districto Federal*, el D.F., the capital.  
My *madre* took my *padre's* taxi to go to work.  
My mom's dad didn't like my dad, but my mom didn't care.  
Their love was strong.

My parent's moved here when they were seventeen.  
My dad had to work a lot because my mom was pregnant.  
They've been married for about twenty-five years.  
Now my dad and all his brothers own their own  
construction company, called The Padilla Brothers.  
My mom is an oral health educator and she goes  
around to dentist's offices and teaches people how  
to brush their teeth right.

I want to be a fashion designer,  
a photographer, and most of all, an actress.  
I believe in a world without racism,  
where people think green and encourage each other.  
I don't want a world with war or violence.



I am a good listener and I know when to put other people before me. I support people. I am an advocate.  
I am from a family that cares for each other, and sticks up for one another.  
I am full of potential. I have integrity.  
I respect people, and I have charisma.  
I am proud to be who I am.

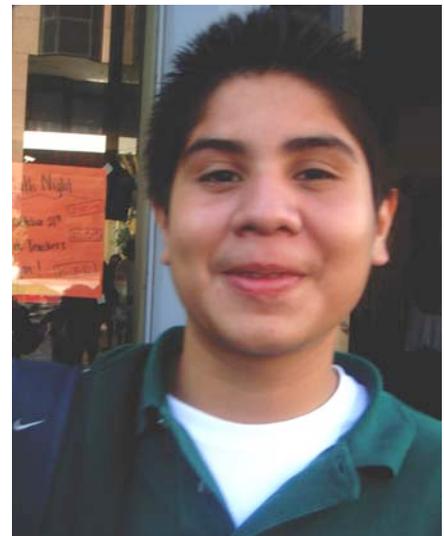
## **BRYAN MELENDEZ**

### **Do You See Me?**

I am not silent.  
I am not stupid.  
I am not invisible.  
I am not an annoying person or a bad person.  
I am not mean.  
I am not a person who likes talking about people, such as my friends.  
I am not a sports freak.  
I am not a shy person.  
I am not a gamer freak.  
I am not a poor person.  
Nor a rich person.  
I am unique.

### **Who I Am**

I play video games, with my friends or my brother.  
I respect people, from talking to not talking, such as saying things that will help motivate a person, and not saying things that could hurt a person.  
I argue on things that need changing.



I play sports and help people in the neighborhood.  
I donate food and give out change to people in need.  
I take things fair, and give fairness back.  
I am these qualities that I share out to the world.

## **Some Things I See**

Some things that I see in the media as an example of discrimination are mostly on TV shows, such as they put people of color as workers or slaves, and the white people as the owners. Another example is that I saw in the news that two people were applying for a job. One person of color, and the other a white person. They told the person of color that they were out of jobs and spots, when they really were not and gave the job to the white person. This can affect family members who are people of color because they know that they are not workers or slaves of another person, and are like any other individual.

## **The America That I Want**

The America I want to see in the future is building better communities around me, also cleaner streets, less or no graffiti and gangs, less discrimination against people, more people helping people, such as donating useful things that they don't need, instead of throwing them in the trash. Not only helping people, but helping the whole community, such as volunteering and activities that will make streets cleaner and food drives. And if people know things need a change, they should stand up for what's right for everyone else—such as, students like us.

# DIGNA CASTRO

## Who I Am and Who I'm Not

I am always happy, a girl with one dimple.  
I am not a follower, a *ranita*, or a boring person.  
I have a beautiful mother who I got my looks from.  
I have a dad who smiles when he sees me.  
I am not Mexican, I am Hondurean.  
I was born in L.A.  
I am not quiet, or your doll face.  
I am not spoiled or a dumb ho.  
I am not a person who will always give  
other people what they want.  
I am a put-it-out-there person.  
A person who loves to sing, even though  
it does not always sound that great.  
I come from a community with graffiti,  
with people sleeping in corners,  
and I once gave twenty dollars  
to a homeless woman with a baby  
in Honduras. I am not a troublemaker.  
I am from a group of leaders.



## What I See

The community I want has no discrimination.  
We reduce, reuse, and recycle, and there's no more pollution.  
Clean streets, nice people, and  
everyone has shelter, food, and love.  
People see the glass as half-full, not half-empty.  
We are full of positivity!  
And, we could have a Lady President!

# HUMBERTO PEREZ BELLO

## I AM

I am an intelligent guy who plans on making some change to the world no matter what it is—

whether its through our government, or simply just saving another human life.

I am part of a family that sticks together, riding the roller coaster of life.

I am a guy who likes metal and heavy metal, not classical music.

I am a guy who can listen to someone but knows how to correct someone when they are wrong.

I am someone who is judged easily without knowing much. I am shy but can really speak my mind.

I am proud of my Hispanic culture. I am not invisible. I am essential.

I am not just any other teenaged Latino living a life full of bad things. I am not the kid who lets himself get talked trash by people.

I am not any ordinary kid going to school and doing bad in school, but I am not the smart and boring kid I am in class.

I am not a kid who comes from a family infested with kids. I am not from a family full of bad influences or stupid people.

I am not the guy everyone thinks they know. I am weird, but did you know weird is a *new unique*?



## The America I Want

The America I want is full of people who are different from each other yet know how to treat each other with respect.

The America I want is full of people who have rights, and help others. No fingers pointing to Latino or black people. The America I want is full of people who think of ways to solve problems and don't just argue.

# GASPAR ZARAGOZA, JR

## Do You See Me?

I am not a wetback but if I was,  
I wouldn't be ashamed of myself.  
I am from writing that speaks out to people,  
that maybe will one day change the world.  
I am not a father, and other Latino boys  
are also not fathers, though people assume we are.  
I am not a gangbanger, a shoplifter, or a trash-picker.  
I am an intelligent student  
who will go to Harvard or Stanford.

I am not invisible  
I am not a whoever person

I am not a gamer freak / no life  
I am from playing video games with my friend's usernames:  
*kileope, kpackjr, cysticcoast*

I am not fat, but curvy. Yeah!  
I am not a nerd,  
I am not a four-eyes  
I am shy but once you know me,  
shy is something that is history.

I am not poor  
I am from an okay neighborhood that spells out home.



I am someone who can be playful with others  
so they get that laughter you need every day.

I am not a lazy-ass just because I sit around  
I am not a weirdo  
I am not your slave  
I am not from an alcoholic parent.  
I am not a mistake.  
I am from a hardworking family that I see only sometimes,  
though I know that they'd rather be with me.

I am from Mexico, it's people and their delicious food.  
I am from a mother that left her home because her father  
was going to sell her. I am from a father who wanted  
some adventures so he went out to see the world.

I am not trash  
I am not stupid

I am not someone who ignores others in need.  
If I see an old lady drop her keys, I will pick them up  
and give them to her so she can go back home.

I am from the little light that goes through the dark room,  
that will one day be bright—so bright nobody can make the room  
dark anymore.

## **The America I Want Is...**

The America I want is an America where others support  
each other even if one does something wrong, an America  
that is free from racism and where you won't feel different  
because of the color of your skin or your ethnicity group.

An America that is willing to have peace and love  
and if there is always an argument, to resolve it with  
sitting around and compromising, instead of violence  
and wasting lives, and wasting money, and wasting people.

An America where people work together to create a better  
America for others. An America where someone will always be there for you,  
having a helping hand so if you are trapped  
in that hole, you will get out.

An America in which our definition of hate will not go amongst people, only amongst objects, and even then, people will correct themselves, and say “dislike” instead of hate.

An America in which we don't discriminate against each other, or make each other feel bad, but instead we compliment each other.

An America in which we respect the Earth as its given us so many useful resources. We thank the Earth.  
An America in which respect is a law that must be reinforced so our nation will be named an America that Respects.

An America that is nice and always having a smile, so if you have a frown, you can change that frown upside down.

An America in which you do your part so our nation will be a greater nation. An America with no hard feelings and no violence, but an America that will not tolerate such things. An America that gives equal power to everyone, no matter how rich, how poor, or how they look.

A world in which world hunger will not exist, and corruption will be known as history.

A world in which money is not the priority, but the people are.

A world in which every nation helps each other instead of being named “The Best Country in the World” or “The Worst Country in the World.”

A world in which Martin Luther King's dream will really come true and not only white and black children will learn together but children of all colors will come together.

An America that is really sincere with its people.  
An America that not only makes itself powerful, but helps make other nations stronger.

So would you like to go with me to this new America, that me and you might one day make?

## Camino Nuevo Charter Academy

Since opening its doors in 2001, Camino Nuevo Charter Academy (CNCA) has become one of the top performing charter schools in Los Angeles. It is spread across three campuses in the city's downtown. The Harvard campus (grades K – 8) serves more than 460 students and their families—96 percent of whom are Latino—in the MacArthur Park/Pico-Union Neighborhoods of Los Angeles. All three campuses seek to educate students in a college preparatory environment with a curriculum tied to state standards while incorporating an emphasis on the arts, social justice, and parent and community outreach. In 2008 - 2009, CNCA Harvard had a combined API score of 817, well above both the district and state API averages.

### Contact:

**CNCA Harvard Campus**  
**635 South Harvard Boulevard**  
**Los Angeles, CA 90005**  
**Phone: 213.736.5542 | [www.caminonuevo.org](http://www.caminonuevo.org)**

## 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:

**National Council of La Raza (NCLR)**  
**Raul Yzaguirre Building**  
**1126 16 Street NW**  
**Washington, DC 20036**  
**Phone: 202.785.1670 | [www.nclr.org](http://www.nclr.org)**

## 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.

### Contact:

**What Kids Can Do, Inc. (WKCD)**  
**PO Box 603252**  
**Providence, RI 02906**  
**Phone: 401.247.7665 | [www.wkcd.org](http://www.wkcd.org)**