Report of the Third Conference
Empowering our Youth Through Resilience and Resistance

Conferencia de Liderazgo de la Juventud Centroamericana

Friday, December 8th, 2017 * From 9:00 am to 5:00 pm
California State University Los Angeles * 5154 State University Drive, Los Angeles, CA 90032

Mission: To end violence and promote peace in our Central American communities through violence prevention and intervention; the promotion of human rights in immigrant communities and the empowerment of youth and families to achieve their full potential in a just, safe and healthy society both in Los Angeles and El Salvador.
**Homies Unidos Declaration:** In January 2015, one of Homies Unidos’ Joven Noble program graduate, Wilmer Escobar, wanted to bring Central American Refugee (CAR) youth together to share space where they could speak about the issues that affected them. This conversation led to the idea of the Central American Youth Leadership Conference. Our mission supported such a vision because it helped to pursue the elimination of the stigma labelled on so many of our immigrant youth. In addition, Homies Unidos supported this cause because it would present culturally competent access to alternative education, development of leadership, build self-esteem, and health education programs linked to the promotion of social justice programs that make a difference in the homes, schools and streets of our resent immigrant youth who have endured traumatic events in their countries.

We declare that Homies Unidos will not abandon these youths or their families. That we will be there as they struggle to integrate into their communities, schools and home. We will seek resources through our allies to help them heal from their traumas and have successful lives.

**Introduction**

Our third Annual Central American Youth Leadership Conference: Empowering our Youth Through Resilience and Resistance took place on December 8, 2017 in the Student Union at California State University of Los Angeles, the conference was a well-attended and was a great success. Our youth were acknowledged by our elders, elected officials and community leaders by welcoming newly arrived immigrant youth fleeing violence in Central America into the city of Los Angeles. Homies Unidos is extremely honored and thankful with the organizations, elected offices and business partners for their participation in our third annual 2017 Conference.

Last year’s successful conference provided access to resources available to newly arrive immigrant youth. Close to 500 youth from 13 local schools, benefited from services providers who were providing information in the booths.

In this conference, we addressed today's anti-immigrant environment, violence and the current status of our youth refugee. We had workshops and the Resource Fair with a diverse range of resources for refugees and their families. We culminated with a musical concert that exalted the mixing of cultures: refugees and their families, communities, and schools.

The increasing numbers of CAR youth who are crossing the border seeking safety and refuge is not a new phenomenon. The first wave of unaccompanied minors came in the 1980’s fleeing the wars in Central America. Since then, there has been a steady flow, but only recently has there been a dramatic increase of CAR youth fleeing from a violence that has devastated thousands of families and has a direct impact on the city of Los Angeles. The Department of Homeland Security estimated that in 2014 alone, 68,500 CAR youth entered the United States. Jurisdictions across the U.S. have, at varying levels, worked to prepare and coordinate their legal and service delivery systems to accommodate the
waves of children. In 2015, there was a decline by 42% to 39,970. This was mostly because the U.S. requested Mexico to make an effort to stop the flow of immigrants from Central America. In the light of the U.S. elections in 2016, there has been an increase of 20,000 more than in 2015, to 59,692. In the first two months of 2017, the U.S. Border Patrol apprehended 14,128 unaccompanied refugee minors. Los Angeles County has received 50% (10,741) Unaccompanied Children with local ‘sponsors’ since 2014. This number does not include those who are in detention, in foster care, were not apprehended at the border or those who are not currently in the legal system.

These youth embarked on a dangerous journey through Central America, fleeing from displaced and displaced families, community, and schools. The culture shook as well the displaced communities, where drugs, gang and housing issues exist. depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Homies Unidos with Saint John’s Well Child and Family Center have partner to support unaccompanied minors who have navigate the legal system and provide referral services.

Homies Unidos along many mental health, legal and higher educational organizations have come forward to address many of the issues these youths are facing. These services are not accessible to all unaccompanied minors. These is the reason this conference is so important. We bring Service providers, education agencies and advocacy groups together in a higher education learning facility to share their services to unaccompanied minors.

We are working to help these youths successfully integrate into their communities, homes, and schools. There is much more work to do! We invite you to come and learn about the work community organizations are doing to protect these youths and how you can be a lending hand to help these you feel welcome in their new home. We want to thank all the organizations, legal and elected officials who help us have a successful conference in 2017.

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1 https://fas.org/sgp/crs/homesec/R43599.pdf
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Coordinators and Volunteers
Organizing the Second Conference took a lot of kind and strong souls and warriors like you, thank you so much!

Organizing Committee
Alicia Vargas Briana
Rodríguez
Guillermo Hernández
Jasmin Iraheta
Kenia Guardado Kevin
Castillo Leda Ramos
Luz Borjón-Montalvo
Mariely Anais Pozuelos
Nalya Rodríguez Nicole
Mitchell
Paula Guadron

Volunteers: Aurora Rico
Brenda Valiente Cindy
Cox Ucles Ester
Hernández Gonzalo
Martínez Harold
Gutiérrez Lilian Zazueta
Marek Cabrera Martin
Isaac Nathalye Lopez
Ramiro Gómez Roció
Veliz

Youth Participants, Volunteers:
Blanca Mejía Eduardo Zacarías
Fátima Velásquez Gerardo Lopez
José Avendaño Josué Rodríguez
Josué Ponce
Juan Mejía Kenia Leiva Marta
Enríquez

Host Organizations:
Surge
MEChA - Cal State LA / Movimiento Estudiantil Chicanx de Aztlán
Dreamers Resource Center IPR /
Healing Space Artz Carecen
Bresee Foundation CLUE
Dreamers Resource Cente

THANK YOU ALL!
The key to the success of our youth rests in people like you!
Special thank you to the Cal State Family
CONFERENCE RESULTS

We evaluated the Conference through a two-pages surveys focus on the results and accomplishments.

-  **Who was included in the evaluation?**
- Members of the organizing committee and volunteers
- Participating Students

  **What did we evaluate?**
We evaluated the Conference based on what we worked and achieved before in the organization of the event and the day of the conference itself. The surveys included questions of the performance, the registration, inauguration, workshops, venue, transportation, food, resource fair and musical concert.

**These were the principal results pre-Conference:**

Over the last three years we have improved our organizing efforts as the annual Central American Youth Leadership conference becomes institutionalized. We have gathered a large group of volunteers and youth involvement. We trained unaccompanied minors to be leaders in the participation and development of the conference.

80% of participant evaluated thinks that we achieved the Conference goals. Conference facilitators facilitated the dialogue about issues affecting the unaccompanied minors and it made them feel welcomed, appreciated and acknowledged.

100% of the following objectives were achieved:

1) Assembly of a large amount of recently arrived Central American youth was accomplished, and the impact reached across relevant areas within LAUSD;
2) Students were welcomed & provided for satisfactorily (meals/transportation/language);
3) Opportunity to engage in relevant cultural/programming activities was created.

The organizing committee members thought that we needed to improve the organizing process, some logistics and the evaluation tools. For them the goals were achieved but we need to improve:

1) Inclusion of all participants/students in an opening ceremony that fulfilled the goal of creating cultural awareness, promoting positive cultural identity, and honoring their Central American heritage;
2) The Program follow up with continued character/identity development or support in between annual conferences;
3) The Resource Fair that would include ample holistic representation of community resources.

The Organizing Committee team for the most part, had the experience of being from Central America or had been immigrants themselves. They felt that everything went according to plan. Besides more
than 90% of them were volunteers. Additionally, 80% of the organizers/volunteers agreed that the planned activities such as logistics, fundraising, program, workshops preparation, resources fair and music concert were somewhat completed effectively and within the time frames.

Furthermore, we were able to utilized the online registration more effectively than prior year. We expected around 400 youth and through the help with LAUSD and the outreach conducted, we had over 500 youth participate. Some schools were told to limit their students to 60 for space on buses. We field trip applications were filled and collected at the conference.

Survey stated that we were 60% to 80% effective in logistics, program/inauguration, workshops, the resources fair and the music concert. Those activities were engaging, motivational, entertaining, and useful.

In contrast for the students/participants all those activities were between 90% to 100% effective and well performed. (See charts below)

The outreach and promotion, as well as the transportation, were 100% effective. LAUSD provided 100% of transportation for LAUSD schools. The chart below shows 8.3% of the participants resolved their own transportation. Cal State was a great location. Beside we had a good combination of volunteers (41.7%) and 66.7% stated that the inauguration was very good, short and entertaining.

Overall the major challenge was the lack of funding. organization that participated in the previous conference were uncertain of continued funding from the federal government to support unaccompanied minors and did not have funding for sponsorship.

**Conference Day – a great moment of joy and unity**...

- Registration was conducted promptly at 8 am. Schools started dropping off students. We had volunteers having them sign in and collecting the parent consent forms. We realized that many of the student had not registered on line. We had planned for 400 students and we had 550 students arrived. Learning from the prior conference we made sure that we had a large facility and we were able to accommodate all the students. We provided students with gift bags and T-shirts of the conference.

**Let’s the images speak of the historic youth welcoming and official inauguration**...

- The inauguration took place in the University Student Union. Custodians quickly realized that all the students will not fit in the auditorium and closed the door when it was filled to capacity. We organized our volunteers and directed the students to the stage outside the auditorium.
- We launched our inauguration with an Indigenous cultural performance performed by MayaVision / Policarpo Chaj—Centro Cultural Techantit / Nana Haydee Sánchez - Guillermo Hernández.
- Norma Roque from Univision was the master of ceremony, who introduced Alex Sánchez, our Executive Director.
- Following that representative of Latin American Studies, The Dreamers Resource Center welcome the youth to their home the Cal State L.A.
- In the inauguration, students were blessed by indigenous leaders and faith based leaders.
- After our guest were introduced:
  - Hilda Solis, Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors
  - Ric Salinas, Culture Clash
  - Key note speaker – Oscar Torres, Voces Inocentes film
The workshops and information was disseminated to students successfully.

Some highlights are:
- The themes of the workshops were very useful, and the students liked the facilitators and for most of the participants their favorite topics were: (66.7%) Cultural Shock of Youth in Los Angeles and (25%) Health and welfare.
- They liked the facilitators.
- The organizers were able to get students into a circle to speak about their experience.
- While The music workshops were conducted several times to keep youth involve.

The workshops topics were:

- Central American Diversity
- Our Cultural "Bank"
- Using The Voice Against The Silence
- The cultural shock of Central American youth in Los Angeles
- Education in a US school system
- Help yourself to know how to use the legal system
- Your health, welfare and health resources in your community
- What is machismo and what are the rights of Central American women?
- What is LGBTQ, and why is it important to know?
- What should I do, do and have to be able to complete planning and achieve my goals.

For next year, the students/participants suggested the following topics:
- Immigration,
- Your health and welfare,
- Scholarships,
- How to face/cope with adversities
- College themes,
- Vocational trade alternatives
- Feminism/Activism,
- Facing the difficulties of starting (US High School at 17),
- Family separation, emotional wounds,
- The art of emotional healing needs to be addressed a little deeply.
- How to reconnect with love ones, the community in a healthy and safe way.
**Lunch**
During lunch youth enjoyed delicious and healthy Italian and Salvadoran food donated by Viztango and pupusas from El Corredor Restaurant.

**Music Concert**

Finally, we proceeded to enjoy the entertaining and multicultural music where the main artists were:

- Jóvenes Centroamericanos artistas
- Moha Humo
- The Union Station
- Inner-City Dwellers LA
- The Jade- Native wind instruments
- Inner-City Wolves
- Francisco A. Mejia

For next year the students/participants suggested the following music bands:

- Moha Humo,
- DJ Warlock One,
- Hip Hop,
- Garifuna,
- Buyepongo,
- Healing Arts Space
- Please include more art, poetry and other created for youth

**Resource Fair**
Several organizations including Los Angeles County Board of Supervisor’s Hilda Solis took advantage to introducing themselves to the community of youth. Service providers where able to register youth for health services. We will extend our outreach for service and vendors for our next conference.
Central American Youth Leadership Conference

Was recommended to be done annually

We appreciate all the volunteers that made our conference the most successful one thus far!!!
Our Sponsors

We have done it again, Homies Unidos is honored to have you as our volunteers, sponsors, and participants in our Successfully Second Central American Youth Leadership Conference on December 8th, 2017.