



Youth Together

Building Just Communities Through Multiracial Leadership Development and Organizing

Dear Youth Together Supporter,

Thank you so much for being part of the Youth Together community. I'm writing today to ask you to make a donation so that we can continue developing young leaders and improving East Bay public high schools.

Why is this work important? Just ask Norma Bautista, an 18-year-old Richmond High School senior. Norma says, "I love YT! It has helped me in every way in my life. It has a huge impact on students. YT takes action – they talk the talk and they walk the walk. YT prepares us to do everything: organize, give workshops, plan events, do public speaking, run campaigns, and educate other youth. They give us resources."

Norma joined Youth Together when she was a sophomore. At Richmond High and the other schools we serve, students face a lack of basic resources and unsafe, unhealthy learning environments. In the past 2 years, Youth Together taught Norma how to do community organizing and helped her learn how to team up with other students of many races to create positive change at Richmond High.

For example, Norma and other Youth Together students are creating a "college-going culture" at Richmond High. To start, they surveyed 1,200 other students to find out what they knew about college access. 80% wanted to attend college but only 20% knew the steps to get admitted. Youth Together students created an action plan, recruited colleges to take part in Richmond High's first college fair in several years, and included a "reach for college" message into the rallies, performances, and other events they organized during the year.

Norma and her Youth Together peers are a strong community of youth leaders. They knew they had to take action in response to the shocking rape of their 15-year-old schoolmate last month. The media coverage blamed youth culture and labeled the youth community "animals" and "emotionally retarded". This negative public reaction further traumatized the students who were struggling to make sense of the attack on their friend.

Youth Together was there to support them. We created a space for them and their teachers to talk about the experience and how they wanted to respond.



As Norma described it, “YT educated us about rape. They told us it wasn’t our fault. They told us who we are – not animals – and they encouraged us like crazy. They connected us with the principal and administrators so we could talk. They helped us hook up with other organizations, too. They helped us in every way.”

Together, we planned a press conference where the students and teachers could speak for themselves. We helped the youth decide on their key messages and prepare to talk with the media. This enabled the young people’s voices to be heard directly by the public. It also helped counterbalance the media’s sensationalistic coverage of the incident that vilified youth of color and tried to pit the races against each other.



With teachers and students, we also planned a 3-hour vigil that drew 300 people to a football field outside the school. A friend of the young woman who was raped read her words to the crowd: “Let the anger cause change, change that is necessary to keep our children, our neighbors and our friends safe.”

Through the press conference and the vigil, young people were able to show that they *do* care about the young woman and that the bystanders who did nothing while she was attacked *do not* represent her peers. They brought about a larger community response to the incident and kicked off a fundraising drive for the young woman’s medical bills. In an environment where youth sometimes fear retaliation for speaking out, they created a way for everyone to protest the violence safely – together.

Norma and her peers want to have a long-term impact, too. They are asking themselves questions like: What is the students’ responsibility to prevent violence? What should respect look like in our community? How do healthy dating relationships work?

Many high school behaviors are set in 9th grade, including relationships between young women and young men. Recognizing this, Youth Together leaders are also advocating for a section on “civil responsibility” to be included in an existing 9th grade course. This section will teach students about legal issues relating to harassment. It will help them think of multiple ways to respond to a crisis situation involving themselves or other people.

I’m sure you’re aware that the phenomenon of sexual abuse is real and deep. The rape incident has brought out a strong need for youth to explore it. To provide structure for these conversations, Norma and other Youth Together leaders have gotten agreement from the school administration to hold “gender caucuses” in 20 difference classes for all 1,800 students at Richmond High. In these gender caucuses, young women will have the opportunity to talk openly among themselves about the incident, and to break down the sexism and harassment they experience personally. Young men will have the chance gather separately to dwell on the topic of sexual abuse, what it means to be a man, and how to love another person in a healthy way.

What did Norma learn from this experience? “I learned that I’m not afraid to speak out. I have a voice. YT helped me learn that I can use it. Everything we say is important. Many other students want to speak out but they are afraid. There is definitely unity and support in our community. We don’t settle for less. We do whatever is possible to make positive changes in our school. We didn’t just let the rape go by. We did something. We will do anything to help our community, students and adults, too.”

For the past 13 years, Youth Together has transformed communities by developing youth leaders, forging alliances between different cultures, and leading school change initiatives. We provide our services at Richmond High, Skyline, Castlemont, Fremont Federation, Youth Empowerment School (YES), and Berkeley Technology Academy. We also operate two multi-service youth centers -- one at Skyline and one at YES. We develop more than 200 student organizers each year, and have a positive effect on 5,000 of their peers.

I am proud to report that Youth Together was awarded the *Champions of Change Peace Prize* by the Agape Foundation last September.

Please show your support for East Bay youth leaders by making a donation to Youth Together today. Your gift will support our work at Richmond High and at all our school sites.

In sincere appreciation and unity,



Prishni Murillo
Executive Director

P.S. It’s safe and easy to donate online at <http://www.youthtogether.net/peace/donate/>. And as Norma says, “Your money will not be wasted! This money builds up youth leaders, something you don’t see in every school.”

