

Youth Conference

Salesian Family Youth Center



Youth Voices of Los Angeles: Grounded Perspectives & Visions for Change A Community Report from the Salesian Youth Conference

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Participants: Over 100 young people from across Los Angeles

Purpose of the Gathering

Youths across Los Angeles were invited to speak honestly and courageously about two key questions:

1. **What are the biggest challenges you face living in Los Angeles as a teen?**
2. **What can you do to make Los Angeles a better, more inclusive place?**

The following report reflects their collective voices. It is not just a summary of concerns; it is a **blueprint for transformation** led by the young people most impacted by our city's future.

I. What Challenges Do Young People in Los Angeles Face?

Young people surfaced real, personal, and systemic issues, grouped into the following themes:

1. Mental Health, Anxiety, and Emotional Strain

- **Test anxiety, pressure from parents,** and unrealistic expectations in life
- **Bullying, self-doubt, low self-worth**
- Feelings of **loneliness, helplessness, and isolation**
- Lack of mental health awareness and **safe spaces to talk**

2. Educational Disparities

- Poor funding of schools, limited resources
- **Lack of financial literacy, scholarships, or tutoring**
- Stress from standardized testing and a lack of real-world curriculum
- Limited guidance for life after high school

3. Safety and Environmental Conditions

- Concerns about **violence, homelessness, drug use,** and street crime
- Inadequate infrastructure: **potholes, broken sidewalks, lack of streetlights**
- Lack of clean and welcoming public spaces

4. Cultural Tension, Displacement & Gentrification

- Fears around **discrimination, deportation, and racism**
- Loss of cultural heritage due to **gentrification**
- Youth expressed that what makes LA unique, its **diversity and traditions,** is also at risk

5. Poverty and Basic Needs

- Lack of access to **food banks, clean water, shelter, and healthcare**
- Few job opportunities and limited financial support for low-income families
- **Overlooked needs for support around addiction and substance use**

II. What Can Teens Do to Make LA Better?

The most powerful insight from this conference was that **youth don't see themselves as helpless—they see themselves as leaders.**

They offered bold, actionable ideas across four categories:

1. Empower Through Education

- Educate youth on **financial literacy, politics, and life skills**
- Increase access to **scholarships, academic support, and real-world career guidance**
- Offer programs that teach youth how to lead and support each other

2. Activate the Community

- Create clubs and youth-led organizations focused on **mental health, service, and culture**
- Host **community events, clean-ups, and dialogues** about issues affecting neighborhoods
- Advocate for **youth input in local budgets, school decisions, and safety plans**

3. Create Inclusive and Safer Spaces

- Build **trust** by encouraging youth to speak out, support one another, and be open-minded
- Offer **anonymous support groups** for addiction, abuse, and trauma
- Ensure youth feel **seen, heard, and accepted**—especially those often pushed to the margins

4. Foster Leadership and Representation

- Encourage teens to **take on more prominent roles** in schools, parishes, and community centers
- Empower youth to plan events, lead initiatives, and share their stories
- Provide **mentors and systems of support** to accompany them on this journey

There is an undeniable truth in these conversations, **the youth of Los Angeles are paying attention. They care. They are already leading.**

They are not waiting for politicians or systems to save them. They're asking for tools, trust, and a chance to be part of the solution. If we want to build a safer, more inclusive LA, we must **start by standing beside these young people and listening.**

Their vision is not only possible, but also urgent.