



# California School Health Centers Association Spotlight on **Nidia Escobar** From Manual Arts High School

**Nidia Escobar**, a senior at Manual Arts High School in Los Angeles, received the National Network for Youth's **Youth Leadership Award** in Washington D.C. on January 29, 2008 for her leadership in peer health education and health advocacy.

Nidia expressed, "It was shocking to be awarded for the work that I do through the school health center. The ceremony was really nice because I got to tell people what I do and they were appreciative of the work I have done."

Since her sophomore year, Nidia has been a participant and leader in all of the student prevention programs run by the Manual Arts school health center.

Matt Moyer, project coordinator of the school health center, said, "Having first met Nidia, I recognized her as a natural leader. She is not afraid to step up and offer ideas on how to make changes in her community."

Nidia's service began when she enrolled in the center's My Choice Project where she became a peer educator and was certified through the California Family Health Council as a Family Planning Health Worker. As a peer educator in the My Choice Project, Nidia works to help prevent teen pregnancy on campus.

Also during her sophomore year, Nidia was nominated to participate in the Policy Leadership Program for School Health (PLP). The PLP is a yearlong, statewide program of the California Center for Civic Participation. The program brings together a racially, economically, and geographically diverse group of teens from across California to learn about public policy and to educate policymakers about youth views on school health issues.

"PLP taught me how to be professional and how to talk to legislators and policy makers about issues that matter to me and my peers," Nidia explained.

In 2006, Nidia was selected by the California School Health Centers Association to testify in Sacramento before the State Assembly Health Committee on behalf of AB 2560 (Sen. Ridley-Thomas), the School Health Center Act of 2006. Nidia and other students' testimonies were instrumental in the successful passage of AB2560. This new law will create a state school health center program jointly administered by the Department of Health Care Services and the State Department of Education.

"Through being a part of PLP we developed a bond with Senator Mark Ridley-Thomas who is an alumnus of Manual Arts," Nidia went on to say.

Senator Ridley-Thomas has continued to champion school health centers with his current bill SB 564, the School Health Center Expansion Act of 2007, which would create a state grant program for school health centers.



At the 2006 CSHC Annual Conference Nidia Escobar presented Senator Mark Ridley-Thomas an award for his dedication and work for school health centers.

As a junior, Nidia became one of the founding members of the school health center's Youth Health Action Board (YHAB). Students created the concept of an action board that incorporated participants from all of the health center's different programs (My Choice, PLP, Youth 'N Fitness, etc). YHAB meets throughout each month and students talk about each other's projects and goals. Currently, YHAB is working as a team to create an overall healthier environment on campus.

In 2007, the American Association of Pediatrics asked YHAB members and staff to come to their annual convention in San Francisco to present about their work. Nidia was one of the presenters and the association recognized her for her participation.

Nidia has dedicated many hours to all of the programs at Manual Arts, such as assisting staff in community outreach, lunch discussion groups, after-school programs, and classroom presentations. She is an outstanding peer advocate for school health.

"The reason why I nominated Nidia for the Youth Leadership Award is that she has been involved in all aspects of our health promotion programs," Moyer explained.

"When we started the My Choice Project over three years ago Nidia immediately emerged as a leader. She took information out of the clinic and started putting it in the hands of students on campus. She is from the community so she knows the need for sharing information about sexual health, nutrition and healthy eating – all of the issues that we are collectively trying to address as a group. I am very pleased that she has been recognized nationally for her leadership and could not be more proud of her accomplishments," Moyer remarked.

Nidia further demonstrated her leadership ability and dedication to school health centers

while she was in Washington D.C. to receive the Youth Leadership Award. Nidia scheduled visits with three Congressional Representatives to help advocate for federal bill, HR 4230, the School-Based Health Clinic Act.

Nidia enthusiastically recalled, "The legislative visits were nerve racking! I gave them some background about what I do and where I'm from and that I was in D.C. for the award that I won. Everyone was impressed that I am doing this work and they wanted to support it."

Since then, Congresswoman Maxine Waters has agreed to sign on as a co-sponsor of HR 4230. She joins Congresswoman Hilda Solis who also agreed to sign on to the bill following the Hill visits Nidia conducted.

Nidia is both an impressive youth leader and an inspiring legacy of the programs at Manual Arts school health center. Nidia's story highlights the capability of school health centers to develop young leaders.

Nidia expressed her appreciation for the school health center when she said, "Before being involved in the center I was an average teen who ditched class and was the class clown. If not for the center I probably would have been another statistic – getting pregnant and dropping out. Now I want a better life, and I want to go to college. It is something the center taught me."

Nidia plans to attend Pasadena City College next year. After that she hopes to transfer to San Francisco State or the University of San Francisco.

The California School Health Centers Association applauds Nidia for all of her work and wishes her the best of luck in her future endeavors!

*By: Cynthia Harding & Kat Gutierrez*