



“If one person stands up, everybody stands up”: Connecting Communities for Collective Action

By: Jade Parada, Inner City Struggle | May 2, 2025
Assisted by a PhD Student at the University of Massachusetts Boston

Jade Parada is a passionate young organizer who aspires to foster connectivity within her community and believes that they can be stronger together in fighting for the issues they all face. She was first inspired to organize when she was eight years old, and since then she has been a passionate organizer through her work with Inner City Struggle in East Los Angeles, focusing on issues related to immigration, housing and student justice. Jade wants to continue organizing in the future and also help her community by becoming a neurosurgeon working in underserved communities.

The Origin Story

When I was eight years old, I remember waking up and hearing the news of Donald Trump becoming president. As a Mexican and Salvadorian American, I remember feeling very scared for myself and my family who could be directly affected by Trump’s anti-immigrant policies. This was a pivotal moment in my life that led me to organize.

When I think back to why I started organizing, I also think about moments in my childhood when I had to move around a lot to different cities, just like most Latinx families. Once we moved to Las Vegas, once to Mexico for a bit, and it just reminds me of the struggles I have had to face as a person of color in the United States. Like me, most of the people from my community have been economically marginalized in this country and have been made to live in unsanitary conditions, such as with pest infestations, water seepage, ventilations problems, etc., or

move constantly. For me organizing meant doing something to help them.

My identity has always played a large role in my organizing. I live in Los Angeles, and people who live around me mostly belong to the Latinx community, just like me. My community is mostly poor, and we have been underrepresented in policy making in this country. I am a junior in school now but since freshman year I have had a lot of friends, and we all share common experiences and ideas of wanting to create change and fighting injustices in our community. For me community does not just mean my family or friends, but it includes everyone who shares the same struggles as me, especially the whole body of my entire Latinx community.

The Start of my Organizing Journey

My passion to change things for my community led me to join “United Students,” a club at our school that works on issues related to my community and to California in general. Joining this club really opened my eyes, as I

learned more about the history of the struggles we face today. I decided that I wanted to get more involved. I wanted to directly make a change. So, I spoke to the club advisor, and he directed me to Inner City Struggle, the organization I work with right now. Ever since joining Inner City Struggle, I have learned even more and have been inspired by the people I have met; they are so passionate and readily give their time and resources for the issues they are fighting for. I have been especially inspired by Ariana Rios, who is an academic advisor and an organizer at Inner City Struggle. She is extremely well informed, confident, and a great organizer who has helped me learn so much. While working with Inner City Struggle, I have grown as an organizer and have participated in many organizing activities such as advocacy campaigns and canvassing.

Inner City Struggle works on a wide range of issues, but I am mostly focusing on immigration, housing and student justice. I have always been interested in immigration, but I feel that President Trump's recent policies are targeting immigrants, and my community is directly affected. Housing is also a major challenge for my community, where a lot of people already struggle to afford safe living conditions and face a continuous rise in housing prices. But the income is not going up, like the minimum wage is still relatively the same, making housing even more unaffordable. It is unfair that people from my community are labelled as criminals when they are working hard and pay taxes but are not able to afford something as basic as housing. I see my own parents struggling with rent; they barely make sufficient money to pay that. And lastly, I work on student justice because my experience at school is being directly impacted by policies such as federal budget cuts. Several schools in my district have suffered from these cuts and have had to cut back on services, such as closing restrooms, which are obviously essential, or firing teachers we like; they have experience, but they have been fired.

Experiences in Organizing

My favorite thing about organizing is organizing events with my friends and community, such as canvassing, because it gives me the opportunity to

surround myself with people who truly care about how policies affect us. When we come together to organize, we do not judge one another, we come together to have a voice for change. Last year, my friends and I did canvassing for the elections to advocate for policies such as Proposition 6, a California ballot proposition to replace involuntary servitude of incarcerated people with voluntary work programs. We were taking turns knocking on doors and for one of my turns, I met a really nice old lady. When we are canvassing, we never know who we are going to come across; sometimes people are rude or they do not want to listen to us, which is completely understandable, but this lady was polite and seemed to be really listening to what I was saying. I specifically remember this moment because I realized that people actually care about how policies are affecting them and the people around them.

Organizing is not always easy and comes with its fair share of challenges. Taking initiative and communication are the biggest challenges I have faced in my organizing journey. Once we had to organize walkouts in Los Angeles, which required coordinating among multiple high schools. It was really difficult to reach a consensus on things such as meeting points or who should start the walkout. When we work on such a large scale, communication is difficult to manage. Taking the initiative is a challenge because once you decide to do something, so many questions come up: Where do I start? Who do I talk to? How can I make this happen? This is because organizing requires complex planning and a lot of personal and institutional resources, such as time, money, personal effort, etc.

The time requirement for organizing has been a particular challenge for me. I am a junior in high school right now, and I am extremely involved in my school. I take six AP classes and with the class work and other school activities, putting some time aside for organizing has been a little bit challenging for me, especially because I live far away from both my school and my organization's building. I still make it work, though, because I know I have to work hard for my goals, and my aspiration is to bring more connectivity within my community.

Protecting my Community

My community is generally very friendly, but I think people have isolated themselves because of the problems they have been facing regarding their immigration status and out of fear of other people reporting them, sometimes even from their own community. Through events and other advocacy efforts, I want to bring people together and tell them that it is better to fight all these problems together. For example, we are planning to conduct a “Know Your Rights” event. My hope is that when people attend the event and meet others who are going through the same struggles as them, they realize that they are not alone, that it is not just them facing the problem and that we are all in this together. I do not want people to become just friends but rather allies who fight alongside each other for their shared struggles. If we can organize and bring about changes for the whole community and the city, I will feel more at peace knowing that my friends and family are protected.

I am aware, however, that this is not an easy task. Most of the time the groups in power do not want people to organize, especially people of color and underrepresented communities. If these communities organize at a large scale, racist people will be against them. I do feel scared that if at some point we reach the scale where the authorities feel pressure, they might try to hinder our efforts.

I am also aware that I might face some internal challenges within the community as well. According to the cultural norms in my community, women are considered best placed to take care of things inside the house while men are expected to work and take care of the family. There is a term “machismo” which is the idea that men are considered dominant over women. I am scared that people might think that I do not have a place in organizing and I should stay home; this has not happened yet, but I am aware that it is a consideration. For now, I feel lucky to have family and friends who are always ready to help me out with my organizing, and an organization that supports me.

Building Myself through Organizing

My organizing efforts have not just been about what I can do for others, they have also made me grow as a person and helped me learn more about myself. I have learned through organizing that I struggle with initiative. I’m very extroverted socially, but I get nervous when it comes to organizing. My mind spirals into thoughts such as, “Will this work out? Will this actually create change?” I have been a part of many campaigns with Inner City Struggle, but something I really want to learn in the near future is how to organize campaigns on my own. I want to learn how to use my passion to get other people to care about the same issues I care about, because I believe if one person stands up, everybody stands up.

It has also shifted my perspective of how I perceive people. When we see people around us, we normally do not give much thought to what is going on in their lives. When I meet people through organizing, though, I get the chance to know them at a deeper level and learn about what they are struggling with. So now, even if I see people outside of my organizing interactions, I wonder what the person is going through, I wonder how these problems are affecting them. Or when I see a kid, I think about what kind of future he or she is going to live through.

One of the biggest strengths I have developed through organizing is awareness of my history and of the challenges my community continues to face. I believe that when we learn about history, we can actually learn a lot about what is going on around us in the present. Recently my sister shared an experience with me where she suffered a serious racist attack. On her way back from college she was subjected to racial slurs by a passerby. This person literally hit her and punched her and said, “*Dirty Mexicans, you should go back to where you belong.*” A lot of people assume that racism happened in the past and that people of color do not face it anymore. Through organizing I have learned that, similar to my sister’s situation, people of color, including my Latinx community, continue to be harassed and assaulted due to the color of their skin.

If I could talk to the person who attacked my sister, I would use storytelling and narrative building, two very

strong organizing tools, to try to change their mind. I would tell them the story of my family, especially of my aunt. She had five siblings, and when her mother got cancer, she had to leave behind everything, her family, her job and her education to build a life here from scratch in this country. People portray us differently because they think we are here to get welfare or government money, but we literally pay taxes. Just like my aunt, so many of my family members have had to leave behind their whole lives and have come to the U.S. to work hard to support their families.

Narratives are important. Using narratives to challenge prejudice or assumptions, or at least providing more balanced points of view, is an important part of organizing. At school we often learn a single narrative, while organizing provides a more balanced view of things. For example, at school we learned how the U.S. is a strong atomic power, but we did not learn about how millions of people in Japan were affected by the U.S. nuclear attacks. Both narratives are correct but one is obviously truer than the other.

Organizing and Learning in School

Organizing has had a strong influence on my learning in school. Now sometimes when we learn the history of an event in class, I am able to distinguish a white dominated perspective from a more balanced point of view that I learn about in organizing. I can see that certain historical perspectives are presented at school in a way that is designed to make certain races appear better than others. And sometimes it is the other way around. I might learn something in class which I think is really useful for organizing. For example, in AP U.S. History we learn about imperialism and how moving Westward was the goal of European settlers. But many times the effects of imperialism on indigenous people are disregarded, which I think is an important topic that we should work on.

I also try to talk about these differences with my friends because I do not want to assume anything just because I think about it. I ask them if they see the same trends as me. Sometimes my friends agree with me and sometimes they disagree, but it helps me distinguish my

thoughts on what is true and what is just my thinking. I always try to talk to my friends outside organizing about what is going on in the country and some of the issues I am working on. Sometimes they don't realize these things, but I'm worried about them, and I tell them that you should know about this. I want to keep them informed because these things may also affect them. For example, right now I am distributing "*Know your Rights*" posters to be put on doors, and I gave some to my friends to give to their family and neighbors so we can keep as many people informed as possible.

Another part of my life that has been influenced by organizing is my career plans. I want to be a neurosurgeon. I have started thinking now about where I want to work once I get my degree. I have decided to work in underserved areas since quality healthcare is only available to people with high incomes in our country. I want to make it accessible for low-income households as well. I also think that getting educated can make me a better organizer in the future. I want to continue my organizing work at Inner City Struggle for now, but later I might be able to build my skills enough to open my own organization and support organizing efforts financially. I believe education is power, and it can make me a stronger organizer.

My Message for Young People

I believe all young people should experience organizing because they can learn so much through it. I believe that organizing can help you literally grow as a person and develop a growth mindset where you can move away from feeling helpless and start thinking about what you can do to improve your circumstances. It can make you more conscious of the real situations and shift your perspectives. If I had to convince someone to join organizing, I would explain to them how the current policies and events, such as the ICE raids happening right now, may affect them, their families or their friends, and why they need to mobilize to protect their culture and heritage. Sometimes people don't understand how these policies may affect them, and I believe if I can show them how their communities can be impacted, they would want to organize as well.

To me organizing means collaboration and working for real change. These are the goals I'm working towards. It is not always easy, and the strategies I use may not always work on the people around me. But I take all setbacks as opportunities for growth and try to keep working on advancing my skills. ♦

About this Project

This essay was produced as part of a project with the Alliance for Educational Justice (AEJ) and the Community Based and Participatory Research Course taught by Professor Mark R. Warren at the McCormack Graduate School at the University of Massachusetts Boston.

The mission of the Youth Justice Corps (YJC) of the Alliance for Educational Justice (AEJ) is to support young people to develop as organizers and leaders of their peers in their local schools, communities and youth organizing groups. The program provides political education and organizing skills training and connects these emerging youth leaders across the country. The young people are typically youth of color from low-income communities attending secondary schools.

Doctoral students collected the stories of young people leading education justice organizing efforts in their local communities.

These stories are posted on peoplethinktank.us, the website of the People's Think Tank. PTT is a network of thought leaders from over forty community, parent and youth organizing groups, national alliances, and allied organizations committed to building knowledge to support movements for racial equity, educational and social justice, and community liberation, fiscally sponsored by the Schott Foundation for Public Education. For more information on other projects, check out [@peoplethinktank](#) (Instagram), and [@4edjustice](#) (Instagram).



Suggested Citation

Parada, Jade (2025). ““If one person stands up, everybody stands up”: Connecting Communities for Collective Action” [essay written with assistance of a PhD student at UMass Boston]. Youth Justice Corps Essay Series, People’s Think Tank for Educational Justice, Edited by Mark R. Warren and Keno Walker. <https://peoplethinktank.us/2025-youth-justice-corps-essay-series/>