

## ***Puertas Abiertas Testimonies***

### **Theory of Transformation**

**2008-2019**

### **EMANATION**

**2008-2019**

*Responses that demonstrate the stories students brought to the program, positive or negative, about themselves or experience with schools.*

When I came to *Puertas Abiertas* Leadership Academy I was a young man who was rich in his values responsible and who thought was a good enough guy already. Although, this program has taught me many great attributes that I can take onto my life and exceed and be a great leader at whatever I do. (2008)

I was less confident, of myself, and I felt like I needed somebody to like me to be happy with myself, but I learned that the only way somebody can love you is if you love yourself first. I learned to respect my body and I have the right do what I want with it. I learned to be proud of who I am and I don't have to blend in just cuz they tell me to. To stand out and be proud of my culture. (2008)

I was at first more quiet and less with confidence. (2008)

*When I came to P.A.L.A., it was just me. I never thought that I was going to see someone I knew or that I was going to make new friends here, but I did make new friends. That made me happy. In P.A.L.A., I have learned that you always have to expect the unexpected.* (2008)

When I came to P.A.L.A. I was really shy and quiet. I thought I wasn't going make new friends and just stay with the ones that I have. I was nervous but excited at the same time because I heard a lot of good things about this program. (2008)

I was a very shy girl because I felt alone and defenseless. (2008)

When I first came to *Puertas Abiertas*, I was really shy and I wasn't very comfortable con hablando en frente de otros (talking in front of others). Pero

ahora so bien talkative (But now I am very talkative). Me gusta a hablar con los de mas (I like to talk with others). (2008)

Before I came to PALA, I was a student that never ever was in school. I would go there three maybe two days a week to school. When I came here, I thought I wasn't going to make it. I thought that I was not going to come but what really surprise me was that I made it and never missed a day! (2008)

I learn to work with other people even if they weren't Mexicans. (2008)

When I came to *Puertas Abiertas*, I was shy and I had stage fright and I didn't want to talk to anybody...but now that I have talked and spoken up, I feel good. I had really low self-esteem. (2008)

I had an enjoyable time here. I really wish the program could last longer. (2009)

I learned a lot like how to deal with certain problems. I noticed what my values are and what 5 de Mayo is really about. (2009)

*First of all, it was very comforting knowing that Mrs. Espinoza was there, she is a great teacher. (2009)*

What *Puertas Abiertas* did for me was that it helped me open myself. Because before, I wouldn't like speaking out in front of a big group, and now, I can do it without feeling embarrassed. (2009)

At the beginning, I thought that *Puertas Abiertas* would be more a study and writing. Even though it wasn't like that, I liked how they organized it. (2009)

*We all have a story and a dream, and I know that I am not alone to face my obstacles. During all the years I have attended Puertas, the youth group has been composed of people that have the same level of dedication that I have and you don't see this among Latinos at school. (2010)*

I have just graduated high school and that was biggest goal. When I graduated, I never looked at myself and say, "I'm going to college." I never thought or talked about that. I just wanted to graduate from high school. *Puertas* has taught me that without good education, you can only get so far in life, but with an education, you can do so much. (2010)

Latinos have a strong view on how we work together and to overcome things. We may be facing something big pero "*La Raza*" stays "firme" strong. We have a lot of talented minds, we just got to keep our heads up, and work hard for what we want. This is what *Puertas Abiertas* has taught me. (2010)

When I first heard about the program, I thought it wasn't going to be fun. I wasn't that interested about it. (2011)

Before I came to *Puertas Abiertas*, I knew I was a Latina, but I didn't know much about Latinos and I always felt ashamed saying that I was the one that didn't speak Spanish. When my family told me that I was going to this summer academy for Latinos, I got very nervous and embarrassed, just thinking about being in a room with a group of Spanish-speakers and being the only one who could barely speak Spanish. But within the first couple of days, I felt welcomed and comfortable being all around these Spanish speakers and I discovered that it is okay to be a Latina and not speak Spanish just as long as I don't feel ashamed of my Latino culture. (2011)

I feel great here. I am sad this is it. I hope I can come next year to further myself and be a greater leader that I am right now. It feels that every time I come to this program, I learn something about myself. The first time I came, I learned about my identity. I needed that. I was a lost person believing that a rag was my leader, that a stupid blue rag was me. (2011)

*Before coming to this program, I thought that it was going to be very ordinary, just like any other university program, but after the first few days, I learned to speak more in front of many people. I learned to not be so shy and to value my classmates more and more every day.* (2012)

*I learned that we all have a story, some are similar and others are different. Something very important that I learned is that we all have many different values.* (2012)

At first, when my brother ask me if I was gonna go to *Puertas Abiertas* I say, "no" but I just came because I was going to receive credits for college. (2012)

My experience in *Puertas Abiertas* was something I didn't expect. I thought that this was going to be boring or they would talk about things I would already know, but no, I learned many new things. I got to meet great people

that help everyone but mostly, the Latin community and also how we do have a couple Hispanics that work in our community. (2012)

This is the first time I have been in the program *Puertas Abiertas*. I found out about this program because my sister had already been in it and she told me to join. At first, I didn't want to come to the program because you had to speak in front of people. I really don't like standing up and talk out loud because I always get really nervous and I start shaking. (2012)

*Before I came to this program, I thought that it was going to be boring because I did not know anyone and I thought I would feel alone, but then my sister said she would go with me and that made me feel more secure.* (2012)

Before this class I really wasn't into talking into a big crowd. Now that I take it I love talking in front of people. (2013)

When I first came I was really shy and thought that this program was a waste of time, and that I wouldn't get anything out of it. I was extremely wrong though, I learned so much these two past weeks that I wouldn't never learned, now that the two weeks are over I have changed in many ways. (2013)

I honestly don't know what I would have done without *Puertas Abiertas*! I would probably have been lazy, watching TV all day and not been very productive. I am very happy to have spent two weeks of my Summer, actually doing something good for myself and future. (2013)

It made me come out of my comfort zone. And become a team player because in high school, I'm very antisocial because I thought I can only count on myself, sometime so, I don't have to count on anyone else, so I wouldn't have any project by myself. The reason I'm like that is because I grow up believing that way, so it just because a habit for me. (2013)

In this program I learned so much about being proud of who I am. (2014)

*Puertas Abiertas* has been an uplifting experience. Learning about my Latino Culture was inspiring and rare, because I never would have learned about it in school. (2014)

*When I first came to PALA, I felt like nothing was going to work, like everything was going to be very boring and that I was not going to learn anything from this program, but as weeks went by, I started to realize that I was wrong. (2015)*

*I was also starting to feel shame for who I was, my race, my culture and my language because everyone spoke English and was an American, but in this program, I learned that I need to not feel ashamed for who I am and that the Latin race is a beautiful and a diverse race. (2015)*

*Before coming to PALA-Pasos, I felt embarrassed and nervous about meeting other people. I thought that this was going to be like high school and that people were going to be rude and that they were not going to understand me, but from the very first day, I felt much better. (2015)*

*When I had just started coming to Puertas Abiertas, I felt like the program was not very important and I also thought I had more time to be in school, but the reality was that I did not know anything. Now I realize that the beginning was difficult for me, but now I know that this program has made me reflect a lot about many things. (2015)*

At my high school, there isn't many Latinos. There's only a few and that's a really big reason why I don't really like attending there. (2015)

Before *Puertas Abiertas*, I was one of very few others like me who had the same goals and aspirations. I thought that I alone could be successful and that being a leader was to tell others what to do and to be at the top. (2015)

I was also really excited to take this college class where I get to talk about my future and to be open-minded that there are people with almost facing similar problems but also having different lives. (2015)

I felt very shy and timid when I first got here. But as time went by, I started to feel more open. Personally, it takes me a lot of time to get use to my surroundings. That way I can feel more opened and express my feelings. I take my feelings very seriously so for me to be able to express them I got to be confident. (2015)

I felt very nervous coming here. I didn't have too many expectations coming here. I thought it would be like coming to a normal class like in high school. But I never thought this class would change me in a weird way. (2015)

If I had to describe my experience, I would say that it went far beyond my expectations. At first, I saw a bunch of students who were younger than me. I started to think that these students will be different and that I will not be able to connect with them. (2016)

I was very unwilling to come to *Puertas* before the program even started. My sister had participated in it the past 2 years, but I had just never had an interest in it. I was worried that the fact I couldn't speak Spanish would have me ostracized socially, and socially, and not be able to follow the lessons academically. I broke down before the first day even started. (2017)

When I first got here I was really excited and shy, nervous. But most of all I was excited because I wanted to meet new people. (2017)

When I got here I wanted to get out of this program because I kinda felt misplaced . I asked my Mom if she could tell them I couldn't be part of this group. My Mom told me no and to do my best. Than, I did it for her later after two days, honest I felt part of the group I felt welcome, also by the staff. (2017)

This was my second year at *Puertas Abiertas* Leadership Academy. You can clearly tell I enjoy it since I came back. I was very eager to start after noticing new people come to the orientation my excitement was overflowing and spread around to the group. (2017)

Coming into this program I was happy because applying and attending this program was completely up to me. I was proud of myself for putting myself out of my comfort zone. My feelings haven't changed all that significantly. I'm glad that I decided to take this opportunity of grown this summer. (2017)

I got to get out of my comfort zone now I feel better. (2018)

At first learning about *Puertas Abiertas*, it sounded like a lame program about getting ready for college with stuff we already knew. But after seeing all the time I spent in *Puertas Abiertas*, it's sad to see it end. (2018)

I am going to be completely honest. I did not want to come to *Puertas Abiertas*. My mom forced me and I was kind of mad at her but not so mad. I actually like *Puertas Abiertas*. (2018)

My personal opinion, on this program at first was that it was gonna be very boring like school and since I didn't know anyone it would be awkward and not be very entertaining for me. Overall, this program ended up being very fun, happy, peaceful and helpful. (2018)

There were a lot of shy people. No one really wanted to talk to anyone else. All the friends they knew were from the same school and stayed with each other. Everyone felt awkward. (2019)

*Uffff!, I am so grateful for this program. Puertas Abiertas has been a second home for me, much more than school is. From the beginning, I felt very excited to meet new people, interact with others and to be able to be just like I am. I felt like I was among my own, my people. Laughter, tears, smiles, sometimes sadness, but many times PRIDE! This group has been and will be my family.* (2019)

This program has impacted me in nothing but positive ways. (2019)

While attending *Puertas Abiertas*, personally, since I've attended many events and conferences in the past, I thought I wouldn't learn anything new. I thought many of the things were going to be repetitive. However, I was wrong. (2019)

Another activity that really spoke out to me was the filling of the glass cups. It was a very simple and efficient way to know the importance of treating others kindly, as well as taking advantage of the time you have with others because you never know when is the last time you will see a person. (2019)

*Puertas was a lot of fun for me. Before coming to the program, I thought it was going to be boring, but when it finally started, I realized how fun it was going to be.* (2019)

*When Puertas started, I felt very shy and I was very embarrassed because I did not know the majority of the people. I thought I was not going to be able to adapt to this program, I was fearful to make mistakes when answering questions, but each day I felt more and more comfortable. I enjoyed sharing my*

*time with all the new people in this place. We all felt a bit strange at the beginning, but as time went by, we began to feel like a family. (2019)*

*I liked the class taught by Mrs. Patricia Cortéz because it made me feel very close. It taught me that one has to be grateful with what one has and also for the support that our parents have given us and all the sacrifices they have made for us. (2019)*

I think the lessons on scholarships was very important because one of my biggest worries about college is the cost. After learning about all the scholarships available. I am feeling like college is in my reach. (2019)

## **INCOHERENCE**

**2008-2019**

*Responses in which students found themselves in a different space for teaching & learning. This may reflect anxiety, doubts, confusion, a new learning, or experience.*

I was less outgoing when I came to *Puertas*. La primera semana (the first week) was awkward cuz we didn't know each other, but then we all go to know who we were during lunch. I feel like we all know each other well now, and that in this room there's no need to judge anyone. (2008)

*When I came to Puertas Abiertas, I felt strange because there were people from different places and countries. I had never been with people from different countries before. I learned to talk to people from different cultures. I also learned that not every person that speaks Spanish is Mexican. We come from many parts of the world. That also helped me to feel good about myself and comfortable with all my classmates. (2008)*

I've learned how other people feel when gringos or other people ask them "Are you Mexican?" when they're from Peru or Chile, etc. (2008)

When I came to PALA at first, I was just a typical teen confused about school and college. I just wanted to get over and done with my education as fast as



possible, just graduate high school and go to college just for a year or two. (2008)

The speakers who came in and talk about going to college help me a lot but I won't make it because I was not born here in the U.S. But I know I am not going to follow the emanation that people give me I'm for sure. (2009)

I always knew about Rites of Passage, because my brother took it also and he would always come home excited. I wanted to take it my Freshman year but I was too lazy and thought about the whole getting up early thing and said no. (2009)

At the beginning, when everyone was shy and we didn't know each other, it was kind of awkward. After a week or two, everyone knew each other and we were all friends. I think that this has been a great experience for me. (2009)

Through this program, I made a lot of new friends from my culture and some of diverse cultures. I learned that even though we may be from diverse cultures, we share one thing in common: we all want to succeed in life which is amazing. (2010)

*Puertas Abiertas* has been a great experience and I really mean it. When I first came here, I didn't know what it was about, I was clueless, but excited. My mother just gave me the application to fill out to come here, and I am glad she did. I was scared at first, because I was afraid I wasn't gonna know anybody. (2011)

When I came to the first day, and I heard presenters, I started getting interested about it because presenters, were giving really important information which can help apply for college or university, and for scholarships. (2011)

I'm really thankful for those people that were trying to push for us, and motivate us to the next step, to figure out what we really want for our future. *Puertas Abiertas* is extremely helpful to those students that wants to learn and have information. (2011)

*When I first arrived at the Puertas Abiertas Summer Academy, I was a person that was lost in her own world because I did not know much about scholarships, universities and colleges, neither did I know about the opportunities you can*

*have to study even if you are not a resident. I was also a very shy person that was afraid to speak English. (2011)*

*I did not know what to expect on the first day of Puertas Abiertas. I was nervous thinking that this was not going to be fun, but when I entered the classroom for the first time, I felt that it was going to be very fun and interesting. (2011)*

When I came to *Puertas Abiertas*, I was excited because I knew that I was going to make new friends. The first day was weird because nobody talked that day. After two days, everybody started to be more social with each other. (2011)

*Puertas Abiertas has been a fantastic experience for me, something that I never imagined the first day I came here. I always listened to my classmates talk about Puertas Abiertas, but they never told me about their experiences or about all the struggles that the presenters had to endure in their lives and that they share with the rest of the students; they shared very beautiful and moving stories, but overall, they shared how they continued fighting to be someone in life and to keep going. (2011)*

*When I came to Puertas Abiertas, I think I was a different person, I did not have any idea of what I now know. I am very grateful for having been accepted, I feel like I am a different person. Now, I am happier to talk about my community. I have lived many good experiences here in Puertas Abiertas. Every day I come here, I feel very loved by Mrs. Espinoza and by my classmates, they fill up my self-esteem. (2011)*

When I arrived at *Puertas Abiertas*, I was somewhat prepared for college. I was scared, I was afraid of what to expect. I felt that all my allies were gone. (2011)

Well, this program is a really good one. I thought that it was going to be awkward but the hands thing (activity) broke the ice. Yea, I have a new perspective, but I don't know. This program has thought me things that I never knew. (2012)

*When I first started coming here, to Puertas Abiertas, I felt a bit uncomfortable. I felt this way because I hardly knew anyone and I did not talk much to anybody, but this feeling changed little by little. Now that I know the other students, I feel a bit more confident. (2012)*

The day that we came for the first time, I thought. “this is going to be boring.” On Monday, when the program started, I was starting to like it because I was getting information that it was gonna help me in the future and I was meeting new friends. (2012)

When I was invited to *Puertas Abiertas*, I was a little skeptical because I didn’t know what to expect. I was told that this will be a great opportunity for me to learn more about college and scholarships, therefore, I didn’t hesitate when I answered yes. Walking in the door on the first day, I was excited and ready to learn and know what I should expect when I start attending college. I, however, did not know that the classes were also going to teach me lessons that can be applied to my daily life. (2012)

When I first heard of *Puertas Abiertas*, I thought that if I signed up for the program, that I would be in a room of people who I don’t know and that I would feel very uncomfortable. I signed up for this program with the expectation that I would receive more college information because I wanted to be informed of scholarships and other topics I needed to know. I have never signed up for this program, but I’m really glad I did. (2012)

I did not expect *Puertas Abiertas* to be this much fun. I get to meet new people who go to the same school as me. I got to know them better and I am really grateful for this opportunity that *Puertas Abiertas* has given me. (2012)

Then the day came when class had to start and I was nervous. The first days, I was really shy. I didn’t want to talk because I did not know the other students and I did not want them to laugh at me or think that I was dumb or something. This is why I really get shy and nervous when teachers ask me a question and I have to answer out loud. Then I started to feel more comfortable because people had shared things and talked more. (2012)

*The first day, I realized that there were people that I knew, but that I did not talk to and I thought that I would start talking to them during the activities that Ms. Espinoza organized for us. I was able to feel that I could trust people and that I could make friends, therefore I started talking to everyone and that made me feel good because I felt comfortable.* (2012)

When I came to *Puertas Abiertas*, I was shy and I had stage fright and I didn’t want to talk to anybody....but now that I have talked and spoken up, I feel

good. What I learned at PALA, I was really shy and quiet....I was nervous but excited at the same time because I had heard a lot of good things about this program. (2012)

*Puertas* was something totally new and very different. I had to step out of my comfort zone and in the end it was all worth it. (2013)

As a incoming student at Lane Community College, being undecided on what to study I have learned about the transfer program, pathways, certificate program and many other useful things at Lane. (2013)

My first day at PALA (*Puertas Abiertas* Leadership Academy) this year was exciting but at the same time a little weird because I knew some people, but I didn't really talk to them. I had an idea of what to expect but I knew that not everything would be exactly the same way. (2013)

At first I was really nervous of being here after some days I got to know everyone. (2014)

As I came into this program on the first day, I was a little nervous. When we officially started class, I got a feeling that it was going to be a great experience. (2014)

*I first felt a bit down and I did not know about the traditions of different countries, but then I learned to interact, to make friends, to work in teams, to participate, to take field trips and many other things. Today, I feel at peace and happy about all the activities I participated in.* (2015)

*I was feeling very lonely because I had nothing to do and I spent my entire days inside my house. I felt down and I did not know how to find programs to get credits in order to finish high school. I had been informed that I had to be in school for 4 years until I was able to get all the points I needed. I was in eleventh grade and I needed one more year to finish school and this is why I felt sad.* (2015)

*I felt a bit worried before *Puertas Abiertas* because this year is going to be my last year in high school and I was afraid of what my future held for me. The reason I was afraid was because we do not learn about the real world in school such as how to save money and other things.* (2015)

*Before PALA-Pasos, I did not feel as close to my people. I did not feel alone, but I did feel like I could not share the same feelings with the people that were around me. I did not know much about my culture. I felt less informed about who I am. (2015)*

*When I came to Puertas Abiertas/Pasos al Futuro, I realized that there are other people like me. I no longer feel alone and I feel prouder of my roots and of who I am. (2015)*

*At first it was uncomfortable because nobody wanted to talk to anybody else and many students felt uncomfortable, but as time went by, everybody got to know each other better and we all became good friends. We are now all connected because we were able to complete another year here with all the PALA participants and some people have even looked each other up in Facebook to become friends. (2015)*

*Before the Puertas Abiertas program, I felt nervous about participating because I did not know if the participants were only going to speak English, as it is usually the case, or if they were also going to speak Spanish. On the other hand, I did not know if I was going to get bored or if the classes were going to be boring, but everything turned out to be quite the opposite. (2015)*

*I felt a bit strange because I did not know how the program was going to be and I also did not know that we were going to work from a platform of respect towards our identities. (2015)*

*Well, before I started I thought that I didn't know what I was getting myself into. That I would probably make no friends, not to mention I usually don't get along with anyone, not even my teachers. But now I see I was very wrong. (2015)*

*I felt nervous about taking a college class that is about speaking up and being a leader. For me, it is still very hard for me to speak up in front of people and when being a leader, you can't make mistakes. (2015)*

*Before I came to PALA-Pasos, I felt nervous because I didn't know anybody. I thought I had made a bad decision coming and just wanted it to be over. (2015)*

Before coming to *Puertas Abiertas*, I was a bit uncertain of what the program had to offer and if it was worth my time to begin with. I didn't want to go into a place where I didn't know anyone and where others would look up to me as a leader. I was scared of not being able to live up to their expectations. (2015)

I was surprised/shocked to see how similar they are not just in how they conduct themselves but in their struggles. (2016)

Had it been any other program, I would have run and never gone another day, but *Puertas Abiertas* is not like any other program. Everyone in the staff welcome me with such a warmth and kindness, and the other students were so enjoyable to be around (they are so funny!) (2017)

There have been many times in my life in which I felt that I didn't belong anywhere or I was just really different from others, I've never been the type of person to show much emotion. When I first heard about PALA, I thought it'd only be a way for me to meet new people, but it ended up teaching me much more than just that. It taught me how to prepare for my future, how to grow my confidence and most important it taught me that friends are more than friends, they are family. (2017)

Coming to *Puertas Abiertas/Pasos al Futuro* I was nervous and not ready to be part of a total different space, but after the first day that we all bonded I felt relaxed, happy and safe. Now over the course of the 2 weeks almost over I experienced a wonderful time. (2017)

The group I was placed into scared me at first, but now are my closest friends and new family. The whole group itself, 20 students, had many different people with unique personalities; each had something new to bring to the table every day. (2017)

I remember when we started *Puertas* I felt nervous and I did know anyone because I was the only one from North I was shy I really didn't talk a lot by the days passed I started to feel better and comfortable. I got to know more people and made new friends. (2017)

When I first arrived to the orientation at *Puertas* I was nervous. I did not know what to expect but I was happy that I recognized a few people. The first time

that we played the group games/activities I didn't really like them. I saw them as useless, but as the days went on I realized that I began to love them. Another thing that happened to me the first few days is that I didn't talk with my work group members much, I felt kind of isolated from them because they knew each other already. As the days went on I felt more comfortable and I got along with my group members way more! They were all amazing people and I honestly couldn't have asked for a better group. They were all funny, nice, caring they were great ☺ (2017)

When we started the program the program I was a little anxious because I didn't know what to expect. I wanted to do this program to improve my resume and get the credit. I also wanted to improve my leadership skills. (2017)

When I first came here, I was very nervous I was also excited because I had two friends that were going to be part of the program. When I came to the orientation day, I saw /meet familiar and new people. Some of these people, would never dream of becoming friends with. But I was wrong as the program began. I realized how much I have in common with these new peers. (2017)

*When I first came here, I felt insecure about staying, but as time passed, I felt more eager to stay. At first, I felt shy and uncomfortable, but then I started to see everyone as a family member. (2017)*

*This is a program that helped me grow up. When I first came here for the first time, I felt very nervous, but as time passed, I had a lot of fun, I felt confident, I felt safe. There were always people supporting me and answering my questions and doubts. (2017)*

Each one of us were awkward at first but now we are comfortable. We care for each other. (2018)

We break out of our comfort zone and the mentors help us feel welcome and we all make up a community. (2018)

At the start, I was afraid to go and nervous of participating with everyone. But as the program moved on and I began to trust the people there, it became the highlight part of the day. (2018)

When I first came to the program, I didn't know what to expect. The first day I was nervous but as the day went on, I instantly felt comfortable being myself.

*I met many people that I had never met before and each person helped me with something positive for my future. The first and second day I felt very strange and nervous because I was surrounded by people I did not know, but as time went by, I started to feel a lot better because I started interacting more and more with all the people involved and I felt more confident with the support I received from Mrs. Espinoza and all the activities. (2019)*

*The first day was a bit boring because everybody was very shy and nobody talked to nobody, but at the same time it was good because I met every person in the program. (2019)*

At first, I really didn't enjoy the class because we did a lot of interactive activities and I felt really uncomfortable because I didn't know anyone, but after getting to know everyone better, I began to enjoy the class more. I like how involved we were in lessons and activities and how we just did not sit around while the teacher was talking. (2019)

At first, I was kind of nervous because I didn't want to be a rude or an disliked leader, but with the passing of days, I realized that being that leader took courage and determination. (2019)

Later on, I told my friends and family that I was accepted but was enjoying my summer in bed so I told them I didn't want to go. Days passed and I was still unsure if I wanted to go. My mom told me that I should do it and so were my friends. I really didn't want to come to PALA because none of my friends were going. I ended up going to orientation and was beyond scared. I saw new faces and faces that I recognized from school. I didn't really think about making any new friends so I just sat alone. The days passed and I started talking to people that I never really talked to and it was probably one of the best things I've done. Everyone around me was so friendly and I shared common beliefs and interests so it was even better. (2019)

## **DEFORMATION**

**2008-2019**



*Responses in which students described diminishing experiences regarding being a Latino, skin color, worth, or physical appearance.*

What I learned at P.A.L.A. was that be proud about yourself and not try to be someone you aren't just because you want to become popular or noticeable. Also how to deal with racism what to do. (2008)

Another thing was that I wasn't really proud of being Latina, I was to a certain point but I was self-conscious and I compared myself to las gringas. (2008)

I've learned in *Puertas* that just because I am dark-skinned and speak two languages, English being a second language, that it doesn't make me a minority: it makes me a better person than all those who want us out of "their country." (2008)

Who I was when I came to *Puertas Abiertas*. I was somebody who didn't think about what went around my world. I was somebody who didn't love myself the way I look. (2008)

We learned about our morals as a culture and a woman respect ourselves sexually and thro away myths from our culture as well. (2008)

I hated myself because I thought I was fat and ugly.....but what I learned here at *Puertas* is we are all beautiful and smart and we can do it....we can have a good education if we are Latinos. (2008)

I was someone that thought was less to others. When I came to *Puertas*, I learned that I'm not. (2008)

This program also teaches us that there is people out in the world trying to hold us back, but also, people working hard to make sure we pursue our dreams and future. (2010)

What I have learned from *Puertas Abiertas* is to not be ashamed of where you come from and who you are. Always be proud of your culture and never give in to negativity around you. Stay positive. (2012)

I feel like I shouldn't have an excuse to say that I can't do school because I'm not smart enough, it all depends how bad you want it. Sometimes, I would tell her about the people that would make "jokes" to me, about how I can't make it

in the U.S. because of my legal status and she would respond to me so passionately about how I was smarter than they think and then AJ think she would tell me not to lose Spanish. (2012)

*Puertas Abiertas* taught me about college life and how to reach it, but it also taught me that I should be proud of who I am and not let other people bring me down. (2012)

One thing that scared me was learning that the KKK and Nazis were appearing more scared me. I learned in history class about them and how they are racist and frighten me because I don't want anybody to even encounter someone who is racist or gets discriminated. I always knew life was hard and I didn't have to worry a lot because I was Black so I thought I was fine, but there are people who hate Mexicans, Asians, Blacks. There is always going to be someone who puts you down, but you shouldn't be afraid of them and what others say....(2012)

Listening and inter reacting with more Latinos has also helped me to learn about my culture to express myself in Spanish, this program has thought me that it is ok to be Latino. That there should be no shame for having brown skin and having an accent. (2013)

Here we are taught that it is acceptable to speak Spanish, English, Spanglish and be light or dark skinned and still be Latino. We are taught that although Latinos don't have it made for them, there will be support and their success. (2013)

*I felt a bit alone because the school that I attend does not have a lot of diversity. There are no programs for Hispanics. (2015)*

*It is great to be able to speak my first language without anyone telling me that I cannot speak Spanish and to be able to tell my experiences without being judged because many of us here share similar things that have happened in our lives. (2015)*

*I also felt lost in this country and I thought that I was a nobody. I felt a bit down and I thought that there were not many opportunities for us, Latinos. (2015)*

Before *Puertas Abiertas/Pasos al Futuro*, I felt like I really didn't have close friends. I felt like I wasn't really proud of who I am. There was stuff I would

question myself constantly. I kind of believed in the stereotypes towards color people like me. (2015)

Before I came to *Puertas Abiertas*, I didn't really feel so proud of being who I am. I didn't feel much interest. Yet the first day I felt really excited. I wanted to meet all the new people and learn about where they've come from, who they are. (2015)

Before PALA, I didn't really want to learn about my culture or where I came. The reason behind that is because I really didn't care. I hated that I was different from all my white friends. I hated that my skin color made people see me differently. I've never wanted to learn about my history, I wanted to forget about it. I didn't want to learn how to speak my language because I didn't know how to speak it correctly and when I spoke it people who knew how to speak it well laughed and told me I was dumb for not knowing how to speak I well. So I was scared and I want to run away from me: Mexican, Latina, brown, colored, Chicana, brown eyes, brown hair, and short brown girl. (2015)

*Before PALA-Pasos, I did not feel very good, but I also felt like I needed to be connected to others because in the summer, when classes end, everyone goes their own way and the organizations or student groups do not get together and they do not even call each other. This is why I felt very lonely and when I arrived to Puertas Abiertas, I started to feel prouder and happy to know that there are other culture and leadership groups that do not stop working together even though they know that classes have ended. (2015)*

*The Puertas Abiertas program is beautiful and a place in which we learn not to feel ashamed of our culture and skin color. Many times, we feel ashamed of being Latinos and in Puertas, we learn that we should not feel shame or fear for being Latinos. (2016)*

I learned about the importance there is to never to be ashamed of my culture and to celebrate being bilingual. (2016)

I'm really grateful of my skin color and eyes and most of all I'm proud to be Mexican. We're all outstanding people and sometimes all we have to do is look inside ourselves a little more. (2016)

It allowed me to find myself, make new friends and most of all, let me realize how important everyone is no matter their size, shape, skin color. (2016)

I think you should let Jim Garcia, Beto Montes and Sra. Espinoza make the same program next year because it showed us how to be leaders and not be ashamed of our color. (2016)

One thing I learned from being in this group is to be more confident in being a Latina with brown skin color. (2016)

Sometimes, when I am in front of other people, I feel afraid to speak Spanish because I wonder what others are going to say about me. *Puertas* has taught me to not be afraid and I'm grateful for this experience. (2018)

Being in *Puertas* has definitely changed my life. I not only learned how to be a leader, but I learned how to be open to new ideas, open to be who I am, without feeling ashamed. (2018)

*They also helped us to be proud of who we are and to not be ashamed.* (2019)

I really enjoyed talking about stereotypes and how we shouldn't let them affect us or define who we are. (2019)

No one is mean and everyone talks to you. Everyone supports you and helps you become a better person. (2019)

## **TRANSFORMATION**

### **2008-2019**

*Responses in which students saw themselves in a different way that reflected positive self-esteem, personal empowerment, worth, and potential as a Latinx person.*

What I learned at P.A.L.A. was ....about other people's culture's and how to except yourself and others. (2008)

I learned that we must love ourselves a lot in order for others to learn to love us just as we are. (2008)

But now I know I'm beautiful, smart and a great person. *Puertas*, now that I think about it, has changed me in sooooo many ways and I love who I am. I

was a quiet girl who really didn't know who I was or about my culture. A girl who knew she was Mexican but didn't really know what that meant until now. I have learned about my culture and the sacrifices my ancestors and family went through to be in this so-called "beautiful land." I've learned who I am and who & what I represent when I say "I'm a proud Latina from Mexico." (2008)

I learn to love my body just the way it is; that everybody is pretty just the way they look. I learn how important going to school and having good grades is. I want to show myself and all the people who think of Latinos how I want to prove we ARE SMART! WE CAN DO IT JUST LIKE THEM! (2008)

I have learned to step up & take a challenge, think outside the box and give everyone an opportunity. (2008)

I learned so many things. I think everything I learned did change my life. I can tell my parents about everything I learned. (2009)

You have done a lot and taught us many special skills and I will carry w/me always! (2009)

*I will take more care of the environment from now on and I will also learn more about my culture.* (2009)

I can say I look at things a bit different now and I think things through nowadays. I used to jump without thinking well. I still do but not as much. (2009)

*I learned lots about my culture, my health, and the environment and I promise not to use so many chemicals in order to keep our world healthy.* (2009)

My parents use fertilizer to keep our yard beautiful and I didn't know that it damages our environment. (2009)

*Someday, I hope to come back to Puertas, but as a social work professional in order to teach other youth what I have learned. With lots of love.* (2010)

Since the time I started going to this academy, I feel that I have grown in numerous ways. I now have more new friends that without this program, I would not have gotten the chance to meet or the chance to know better. (2010)

Thank you for giving myself, and the other students the chance to see what we would like to get out of the opportunities that have been bestowed upon us for being bilingual and a person of color. (2010)

I know I can be someone in life that there is no obstacle I can't achieve. I can do anything if I set my mind. Of course, at times you fail, but failure isn't the end of your life. Failure is just an obstacle you have to overcome whatever it be going to college or traveling around the world. (2010)

Going to the UO has also changed my life. I never thought that I would need to go to college to become a business man. *Puertas Abiertas* has shown me all the things that I need to become what I want to be when I'm older. (2010)

it also made me see a different way of things. It made me see how better life is when you can think and act in a positive way. Also made you see the risks you could take and the values and goals you could make. All these things are better for you throughout life, although we may not see our mistakes but we are always willing to learn new things and being able to fix our mistakes. This program helped me in many ways to become successful and to appreciate the things I have and I am grateful for that. (2010)

In *Puertas*, I felt happy and also comfortable because I meet a lot of new people and also made a lot of new friends. My experience here was the best, like last year, because we learned new activities. (2010)

*Puertas Abiertas* Summer Academy was an amazing program. I really enjoy coming and I was always happy and cheerful. At first, I was super shy because I wasn't able to talk in front of the class or speak up. Today, I know I can speak up and not be as shy as I used to do. (2011)

*Puertas Abiertas*, to me, is very important as with other students, because this program has motivated me. (2011)

I really enjoyed these two weeks. I recommend this program to every student. I felt welcomed, and also honored, which motivated me even more to come to this awesome program and to keep my education and think and decide what I really want. Not only me, also for my community. I want a better and educated community where everyone loves each other. No matter where you are from, no matter what you are. (2011)

*Now that I leave Puertas Abiertas Summer Academy, I am happy, expressive, and I am not so shy anymore. I am a fighter. I think in a positive way and I am not so negative. Many thanks to Jim García, Mrs. Espinoza and Christian Espinoza, because they helped me be less shy and more open and to lose the fear of speaking English and also to keep going. (2011)*

*I feel stronger to continue studying because I know that, just as they did, I will be able to make it and I am going to accomplish many of my goals. Now I can go back to my school and feel that, even though I am a Latina, I can be a leader and reach everything that I set my mind to without fearing anything or anyone. (2011)*

But *Puertas* showed me who I am a person, a Chicano that needs to make it in this life and make a change in my family cycle. The second year gave me a bigger taste of college. Now, the third year, I feel ready to take the big step and make my goals happen. (2011)

So this just helped me be more outgoing and relaxed about meeting new people. (2012)

Having many persons telling me they are here to support me on anything I need also made an impact. (2012)

This experience also taught me to not give up. Someday that will help me a huge amount as I get older. Another thing that will help me from now on is the information about scholarships and believing in myself, no matter what others say or think about me. (2012)

*Puertas helped me understand things in a positive and honest way. It was a good experience for me and for everybody. (2012)*

These past few days, I have been finding myself speaking more Spanish than usual and feeling comfortable while speaking it. My little brother speaks mainly English because that is the language we use with him but I started speaking Spanish to him for him to get the Spanish comprehension back. I will also try to bring back the values we once had in our house. (2012)

*I feel that I have developed a lot since this program started. I say that I feel like I developed because I do like to make friendships, but since there were too many people, it felt hard to interact. Slowly, I started to get to know everyone and I felt*

*more comfortable because I realized that I was not the only one with problems here.* (2012)

My favorite parts has to be the activities. Is always fun to learn things about your peers in a fun active where everyone is involved way. (2012)

This has been, and will be useful for me, for my senior year in high school. (2012)

...that is what *Puertas Abiertas* taught me. That it is okay to be Mexican that I don't have to be embarrassed that I can be me and be happy. (2012)

*I felt like my voice counted when they asked my opinion and I liked it.* (2012)

What I learned at PALA was to be proud about yourself and not try to be someone you aren't just because you want to be popular or noticeable. Also about other people's cultures and how to accept yourself and others. (2012)

The new people I have meet are wonderful students like myself that will also go into college and pursue their dreams. (2013)

*Puertas* has helped me in many different ways, the biggest way it has impacted me the most was by helping me proud of who I was. I have become a more confident outgoing person which is something I have never really been. (2013)

.... everyone was amazing friends. They were all so accepting and fun to be around. No one got excluded, everyone got along. Meeting all this new friends was the greatest thing that happened in my Summer. (2013)

*Puertas Abiertas* has been a great experience. *Puertas* and the people in it have impacted me in such a positive way each day with the simplest things like compliments each day. (2013)

*Puertas Abiertas* for me is not just a program, its really just a way to get to know me, and who I am as a Hispanic/Latino person. *Puertas Abiertas* has teach me that it is okay to be Mexican. I know am proud to say I'm Hispanic. (2013)

Also being around kids my age and around the same culture made it even better, because I could relate to them! (2013)



*Puertas Abiertas* Summer Leadership really does work. You meet many new people and friends that you would have never met in your life. Not only do you make new friends, but you also meet many important people in life that could help you on getting scholarships and other things. (2013)

I've learned to have No shame, No blame, and no excuses. Also I used to be terrified of front speaking in of people, but in this *Puertas Abiertas* program I have gained confidence and am not as shy as I used to. (2013)

"*Puertas Abiertas*" was a great experience for me, getting to know more people and being around "Hispanics" chilling and having fun was really fun. (2013)

My first day at *Puertas Abiertas* Leadership Academy was a great experience. Meeting new people at first was a great experience, and intimidating, but the activities helped to get to know each other better. By lunch time, I feel like everyone was starting to get a little comfortable, and most of us sat together at a table. We had many good laughs during lunch, and I could feel a sense of connection and a bond starting to form as we left lunch. (2013)

...for being able to give us the opportunity to grow new friendships, develop better leadership skills, become a better person, value education more, and come together as a community and feel united. I honestly don't know what I would have done without *Puertas Abiertas*! (2013)

To say that *Puertas Abiertas* is just a place for High School kids is go hear and listen about the opportunities in the University is an understatement. This is more than experience If I could describe how grateful I am it would be impossible to describe. The amount of knowledge acquired would be impossible to describe important every day I enter this classroom I think of my ancestors would be proud of me. Proud because I come here to learn and be proud of my ancestors and the community who are helping us with much effort to create a better community. Jim Garcia has lead me to think about mentoring, in the future....(2013)

The information was very important to me because is something the program didn't expect me to know, like the root of society. I liked the fact that I was around a lot of brown faces, because it meant that they were people that experienced similar situations when someone feels that they are surrounded by people like them, they build confidence in themselves as Latinos who

proudly identify as Latinos. We also find a part of our identity here at *Puertas*. (2013)

Some things that didn't change was the enthusiasm of our presenters, students and instructors. Our sense of community, *orgullo* (pride) and confidence being a critical part of PALA *Puertas Abiertas* Leadership Academy) also reminded me the same this year at the beginning of the first day it was really awkward, but by the end it, I feel like we all felt just a little more comfortable with one another. We are all definably more than a little comfortable with one another, now being our last couple days together as a *Puertas* group. *Puertas Abiertas* has helped me with leadership and confidence by allowing us to speak for ourselves, not people speak for us or for us to speak for others. It also has motivated me to speak out more when people seemed really confident, in whatever they did. It also gave me a hint of confidence every time a speaker would talk and discuss about their struggles to reach a higher education. (2013)

*Puertas Abiertas*, has been such a good experience. I've met so many people that I share so much in common with. At first, I was hesitant about coming here but now I know it was totally worth it. I've learned so much about college and it's been so informative about it, *Puertas* has also been a great place to learn respect and leadership for ourselves and everyone around us. It has given me a chance to learn that we should be more open minded about our choices. It has not only given us a chance to share our stories but to be proud of them because, that's what makes us unique. Again, *Puertas* has been great and I recommend it to anyone who can come. This academy has definitely been a highlight of my summer. (2013)

I had a great experience in this program and met many new people that will be there for me and I'll be there for them. I hope to see all of the people I saw this Summer next year. (2014)

When I first arrived to *Puertas Abiertas*, I was a shy person! I feel more confident of who I am I feel more motivated to speak out loud. I feel that I am proud of who I am! (2014)

This class and program was definitely the best experience that I had in college class. This class was amazing, and I am sad that is over. (2014)

In this program, I learned to love one another, to never give up in our dreams. (2014)

*PALA's environment is very positive and inclusive. Something that has changed inside me is that, after this year participating in PALA, I have become aware of the fact that I like to help others, especially those that I can relate to. I am so proud and blessed to be a part of this program and feel so thankful that there are people like Jim García, Beto Montes, Elena Espinoza and Paulina Villaseñor that care about the Latino community and hope to help Latinos in our community reach a better education. (2015)*

*I leave with many beautiful experiences in my heart; one of them was to meet new people and their stories. Something that has changed in me is the way that I try to make friends. I was probably shy before because I was in a group in which the majority of people spoke English as a second language, therefore I felt uneasy to speak to them in Spanish, but now I have opened myself up to a different world. I am now very happy, I leave very content, energized, with guidance and why not say that I also feel almost prepared for what is coming next. (2015)*

*Today I feel sad because my siblings will not be able to come to my graduation, but I also feel happy because I am graduating from this program that has been so useful to me and from which I have learned so much. I also feel happy because there are people that care about me and encourage me. They are also part of this program. Many things changed in me, such as losing the fear to talk to my classmates. They speak English as a second language and I was scared to talk to them because I thought they were not going to pay attention to me. I also learned to not be scared to ask questions. (2015)*

*Now everything is very different. I feel proud to be Mexican/Latina and I am very happy of having been part of Puertas Abiertas. It helped me notice that there are many people like me and we all became a family. I changed and I notice that I am a lot more confident in myself and I trust my classmates a lot more. I understand that many things are possible for us if we want them, we just have to trust and to wish for what we want. I am very grateful to the people that told us their story. (2015)*

*Remembering the first day when not many of us knew each other and to now see how we are all friends is incredible. The truth is that I am very surprised of what I have received and what I have seen happen in Puertas Abiertas. The thing that changed in me was the way I think of other people and of myself. The way in which I communicate has also changed in many ways; I rarely spoke Spanish in the past and now I speak it a lot more. The way in which I participate has also changed because I now like to be a volunteer and to help other people. (2015)*

*I think that what changed the most in me was to be able to be the person that I really am with everyone here. (2015)*

*Now I feel better, I know more people, and I have learned many important things. I feel proud for having attended this program. Something that changed within me is that I learned to express myself more and I learned to defend myself through words, respect and love and not through hitting. I learned to be a better leader for my community. I learned to love my roots, my culture, my people, and overall, to love all those people that surround me. (2015)*

*Today I feel very well. I feel more confident in myself and I feel that I am someone else, capable of doing anything. I feel like I opened many opportunity doors and with the advice that was given to me, I felt very motivated, which now helps me a lot and I just want to thank all the people that gave me all the advice because they were all very helpful. Many things changed inside me. The first thing was my mentality to go on and to not be left behind or give up. I also learned that it does not matter that you have lived through many problems, but that all that matters is what you want for yourself. (2015)*

*The truth is that today I feel very happy and proud to be in a program like this because the things that they taught us gave me a lot of information for my education and the change that this program made in me is to reflect and to be very motivated. Now that Puertas has ended, I leave very motivated and with lots of information. (2015)*

*Today I feel proud, I feel loved, I feel accepted for who I am. I feel proud for being Latina and being bilingual. I'm proud of who I am from where I come from, and mostly for my culture. I feel loved by my peers/friends by everyone else in Puertas Abiertas. I feel loved and close to everyone because I can be myself and not be someone else who isn't me. I'm so happy they accepted me*

for who I really am. What changed me was that I learned I need to love and respect myself. I learned that I should never give up in my dreams. I should stay strong no matter what. There will always be ups and downs in life but we will make it and achieve. (2015)

Today I feel proud. Proud of my color, my culture, my family. Now I know I shouldn't be ashamed of what makes me, because even if it makes me different, it also makes me unique and makes all of our Latino community better and with more pride. I feel that what changed in me is that I can respect myself more and respect other people because they've been through a lot. And I'm more proud of myself. Thank you for having *Puertas Abiertas!* I'll always remember this. It was a great experience. (2015)

I feel very different now that I have finished PALA. I feel like I belong somewhere. That it's okay to be Mexican, Latina, brown, colored, Chicana, brown eyes, brown hair and short brown girl. That it's okay that I don't speak Spanish very well. I just need to practice, I still don't really want to learn my history because I know that history will only make me feel ashamed of my culture. So when I am ready to learn, I know that I will be strong enough to be proud of who makes me Mexican. Something that changed in me is that I'm more accepting of myself and speaking Spanish than I have ever been and I am still growing to learn more. (2015)

As of today, I feel new, like myself, like I could be more myself. I feel happy to have met such amazing people. I feel like I found myself in these three weeks of discussion with the help of my family and friends. I've learned to open up and help more. This place taught me how to succeed in life and that things will get tough but we can choose the outcome. With Love. (2015)

I was also really excited to take this college class where I get to talk about my future and to be open-minded that there are people with almost facing similar problems but also having different lives. Right now, I feel I have a voice to share with my peers and that when being a leader to yourself that it is okay to make mistakes because that is how we learn from them and it pushes us to try again and do it right. I still get anxiety when it comes to talking in front of my peers but I don't regret speaking about my thoughts and opinions. (2015)

Today, I feel very satisfied I mean being proud of my roots and who I am, the color of my skin and the way I can speak two languages. Not everyone has that advantage, so I am very proud to represent both cultures. I feel a change in the way I present myself in the way I look at myself. I really enjoyed this program because before this I couldn't stand in front and speak without being insecure thinking everyone would judge me. Now that I speak in front, I feel proud because I'm not just representing myself, I'm also representing two cultures that I am very proud. This has also helped me look out for colleges and scholarships so thank you. (2015)

Today I feel that I had a great time here in PALA-Pasos. And that I have met tons of new people and have had such a great time with them. One thing that has changed is that I believe that I have come one step closer to finding who I am and how I should come and help our community in the future. (2015)

What I feel today is joy, excited and accomplished because I never thought being here would change me. Also, meeting new and wonderful people and being able to open up to them is an amazing feeling. Yes, I was shy to talk to people but that was because of issues that I had and also the students knew one another already and I was the only one from Cottage Grove. Being able to make friends in a short amount of time is pretty good because I didn't want to be alone in this program. Also, the things that I've done is to be more social and open about things. What change in me is everything, to be proud for who I am, to respect where I'm from. (2015)

Now I feel I took the right decision by coming to this program. I was afraid at the beginning but once I started meeting other youth, it became fun, not only fun, but it also made me realize that there is always a first time for everything and that I shouldn't judge without having experienced it first-hand. This program made a huge change in how I view others and more importantly, how I view myself as part of the Latino community in general. This experience made me understand more about others and about myself. The people who supported us filled me with important information which will be useful in the present and in the future. I can't be thankful enough to the people that made this possible and those that makes *Puertas Abiertas* what it is. (2015)

*Puertas Abiertas is such a beautiful, enlightening program. I am really excited to come back because it has so many great opportunities & the leadership activities were so helpful. (2016)*

*I also learned more about who I am, where I come from, where I am and what my are goals for the future. The truth is that I love to come to this program every day because I know that the people that organized it have put a lot of effort into it and have tried to be the best they can be in order for us to learn new things. (2016)*

*The truth is that Puertas Abiertas was a beautiful experience and it was beautiful to be able to share my time with others for 3 weeks. I would like to tell all of you that I love you and that you are all very special to me. (2016)*

*This program has been a very good experience because it has helped me have a different way of thinking. (2016)*

*I had an excellent experience coming to this program and I learned many things to get ready for real life outside of school. (2016)*

I would like to say it changed my life immensely. I am in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade at Churchill High School. I was drawn to this program for what it offered. Last year and I felt so at home and comfortable in the environment that I had to come back again this year. Once again, this program left me amazed about the various aspects of my life and others around me. (2016)

*Puertas Abiertas was an amazing experience. Everything we did taught me something, not just very valuable things but I also met people I will hopefully never forget. It was truly something special and am so grateful for the opportunity. (2016)*

The first day of *Puertas* was really fun we did a bunch of activities and they were really fun. Now I'm still excited but for different things, I'm not shy anymore because I already feel really comfortable with my new friends. (2017)

For me this group has been the best program I ever get part of I wouldn't like going in groups because I believed I was not going to fit in. But here at *Puertas* all the students made you feel welcome and safe. I would come back every

year because the staff made *Puertas* the best program out there for Latinos. (2017)

*Puertas Abiertas* has really helped me grow as an individual. It has brought great experiences and opportunities, not only for me but for every single person in this program. I have met so many people and have made great friends. I am glad that I was able to be a part of *Puertas Abiertas* this year. The bond that is made here is incredible and is the only place that has made feel that way. I am thankful for all the work that gets put into this program. (2017)

I learned a lot of new stuff I didn't like saving up money to buy clothing but now I know and *Puertas* made new friends but there are not my friends I'm happy to call them a family. (2017)

Now that the program is over I feel sad because we won't see each other every day and bond. This place was amazing, I felt respected, loved, appreciated, and important and considered. I will definitely miss this place, I hope to come back next year. (2017)

I feel changed. I don't know how I just do. *Puertas* was a good program the environment had a good vibe and I always felt accepted. I feel better I think I'm less introverted and more willing to try or do new things due to the new found confidence I've received at *Puertas*. Besides that I was able to meet new people, talk to them and hear some of their stories. It made me self-reflect about myself and how although after we're not all best friends we still work together to bring out the best in us and am for greater things. (2017)

*Puertas Abiertas* has been a great support for me. I have trusted the people in this program so fast. At first I didn't think I would like it very much but I ended up loving it and was looking forward to coming every day. I have found great people here who understand me and support me. The memories I have made here in this program will be with me forever. I hope other people get the chance to experience this here we start not knowing a lot of people and leaving us a family after just a few weeks. I will bet everyone here feels the same at least they have made a really good friend for the rest of the life so. I have felt safe here in this program here same at least they have a lot of teens know and in the past feel the same way. They made me feel safe and welcome, loved as well. (2017)



The activities we would do, helped me be less shy. I was beginning to talk to new people. For me to open up and talk to new people is hard because I have such high expectations out of people. But every day when I walked through my class room doors I was happy to be sharing my day with my “class mates.” We now are hanging outside of class which I wouldn’t do. (2017)

I really like this program because I got to meet new people. I had such an amazing time with the people that I got to meet during the two weeks. I thank everyone who made this program possible because These past few weeks went so quick it seemed like it was one week. I wish that it was three weeks. Hope to see everyone next year. (2018)

The program is wonderful and amazing. Everyone that make this program keep going are caring. Due to their caring and passionate personalities have made a close community between us. (2018)

*My experience in Puertas Abiertas was incredible. It honestly was one of the best things this summer. I’m usually very shy so it was a bit scary on the first day when I didn’t know anyone. Now, on the last day, I don’t want it to end. It was an amazing feeling being here with people that come from the same background as me. (2018)*

I think these past few weeks have been amazing. Before the first day of class, I didn’t want to come, but afterwards, I wanted to know what was going to happen the next day. This program changed me. (2018)

*My experience in Puertas Abiertas was incredible. I am happy that I decided to enroll in this program. I was able to create a family in Puertas Abiertas. (2018)*

These two weeks in *Puertas* have really helped me open up and get rid of my shyness and I would recommend this program to any of my Latino friends because it’s a great program. (2018)

*Puertas Abiertas* has been an experience I will never forget. I enjoyed the compassion that all of us have for each other and I am thankful that here I feel safe to be who I am and everyone listened to one another and that is really big and something I hadn’t experience up to now. (2018)

What *Puertas Abiertas*, as an experience has done for me, is essentially change my life. Aside from the essential lessons like scholarship writing and finances, *Puertas* has more importantly influenced how I interact with others. The interactions with other students who relate to each other’s culture, yet,

searching to embrace individuality is unmatched to any other program I've been a part of. . *Puertas Abiertas* has been the most influential period of my life to date. Thank you. (2018)

*For me, Puertas Abiertas has been a very beautiful program and especially, very interesting because it helps us learn how to share with others and also to create a family among all of us. We all left the program completely transformed into a different person.* (2018)

Coming to Puertas Abiertas this summer has been an amazing experience. I have learned many, many things from it and am proud I'm now a PALA student. (2018)

*The truth is that I feel very happy to know that a college like this one exists, a place in which I was able to understand many things. Thank you for being a family to us and for holding our hands. I am very grateful and happy because I met wonderful people, and sad because I have to say goodbye to them. Thank you for understanding that the measure of love is to love without limits. Thank you for providing us with the opportunity to be here. Thank you, thank you for everything.* (2018)

*Puertas Abiertas* has changed my life in many positive ways. I could not be more thankful and happy of the opportunity I took to come to this amazing program. I have found out so much and not just about school but about myself. This program has been a place where I would come to an environment similar to home. I came everyday not to see my classmates but my family. (2018)

This summer, I got to meet another side of me. I opened up like I never did before, and I learned that being different and having a different background only makes me capable of doing more things. Not only did I learn a lot, I built so many friendships. It's a new family. (2018)

This program has changed me who I am. I feel that they gave me more confidence to be what I want to be. The positivity here has really made me think there are people that care even though you don't know them very well. Still, even though we don't know each other that good, we still call each other a happy family. We love each and every one of us. We trust everyone and we are close. They are family and friends. Thank you. I love you. (2018)

*This program has been one of the best programs I have ever attended. I never thought that I would feel so comfortable in a group in such a short time. I loved coming every day and I learned a lot being here. I would love to come back to*

*continue being part of this program. I wish nothing would change and that each new group that is part of this program leaves like I felt, renewed, because I changed a lot from being here. I am more grateful, more open and I feel like my cup is fuller. Thank you very much for everything! (2018)*

*In spite of the fact that I was the only Honduran in the program, I never felt excluded, on the contrary, I was able to do a lot of things and to make lots of friend. We always did activities and games that allowed us to interact with each other and to get to know our classmates better. I am very proud to have been able to be here. (2019)*

I liked that I got to know new people, that I made new friends in this program and that we got to know each other. (2019)

This is an amazing program that I wish I had known about sooner. Everyone is super kind and welcoming and I am definitely sure that I will come back because it was a great experience. ....one of the best programs I've been to. Thank you for everything, I am extremely grateful. (2019)

*I liked this program because it is a very open program that allows us to socialize and to share experiences with other classmates. I really liked to interact with other students and also the way in which staff treated us. (2019)*

This was a good place for people to slowly feel comfortable speaking out loud, and to speak in front of people. (2019)

*Puertas Abiertas was an amazing experience. When I first got here, I was nervous. I didn't know what to expect because I didn't know anyone or really didn't have an idea of what was going to take place, but later on, I felt more comfortable, more welcomed, and accepted, mostly because of my peers. (2019)*

*The best part was that the program is very social and I like the fact that we conduct many group activities. This makes us get closer to others in comparison to classes that do not have group activities. (2019)*

*Every day, we did many activities and I felt more and more comfortable to express myself because I started to feel less fearful of what I said. Each experience was very valuable because we lived it with smiles on our faces. The best part of each day is to live it as if it was your last day and to enjoy it with all*

*the other people you have around. I loved all the Puertas' activities and I especially loved going to the forest. It was a beautiful experience and I learned about new plants and their importance to this planet. I also met new people that I never thought I would meet, and I loved walking and experiencing the beauty and the depth of nature. It was completely wonderful and overall an experience that I will never forget. It was a beautiful experience and I will never be able to describe the beauty of all the things I lived in Puertas. (2019)*

*I started to lose the fear of speaking in front of everybody. (2019)*

*I also liked that we would have a reflection circle at the end of each day. In these circles, we had a chance to express how we felt each day after the classes. (2019)*

Thanks to my students, I am now stronger, more passionate and a more communicative person. (2019)

Each activity we did made me realize that it's good to talk to and meet new people. I was no longer scared and was actually starting to have fun. I was placed with a good friendly leader, full of amazing funny people. I felt welcomed every morning that I walked through the MCC doors or anywhere I went. I felt really supported and was in a place where I felt like I belonged. (2019)