



Create Now Success Story: Jose Luis Ramirez

José suffered a horrendous tragedy when he was just ten years old. His house caught on fire due to a gas leak that hadn't been repaired. He barely managed to escape with his grandmother, younger brother and sister. The boy witnessed his mother burning to death. His mother's boyfriend told him it was his fault because she had sacrificed herself to save her children.

José had nightmares every night after that tragic event. He joined a gang and started getting into trouble with the law and was in and out of detention facilities for a variety of crimes. When he was sixteen and incarcerated at Camp David Gonzalez, José met Create Now mentor Diane Namm.

Diane Namm taught a Scene Writing Workshop at Camp Gonzalez during Jose's English class. She's founder, playwright and director of West of Broadway Theater Company, in addition to writing for film and books for children and teens.

José shared his traumatic story and Diane helped him write it into a powerful scene. We collaborated with the Promenade Playhouse to bring some actors to Camp Gonzalez to give a staged reading. When José saw his story reenacted, the effect was cathartic. He sobbed openly and after that experience, the nightmares stopped.

We have continued to support José. He attends church regularly and is mentoring younger kids. He's now going to college. This experience has also been healing for his family. At our "LA Street Scenes 2" benefit in November 2007, José attended with his grandmother, brother and sister. While the whole family was deeply moved, his 11 year-old sister Jasmine sobbed throughout the show.

Afterward, she asked to speak with all the actors. Jasmine shared that even though she was 10 months when the fire happened she remembered it. By seeing this play, she was able to release emotions she had bottled up inside.

According to José, his sister is like a new person. "Jasmine's doing great! She shared her story with all her friends at church and school." He continued. "Now she has more confidence and she's more situated." We learned that her dream was to become a singer and an actress, so last summer, we referred Jasmine to the L.A. Barnstormers theatre group. She and her cousin Ashley joined other kids to help put together the entire production of "Willie Wonka, Jr."

Media Contact:
Jill Gurr, Executive Director
jill@createnow.org
c: 323.467.9039

