

JUNTOS Youth Summit Planning Meeting at Northern NM College (NNMC)  
Friday, April 11, 2008  
4-7 PM

“I used to be afraid to go to Los Alamos. Now I’m not.” said Española Valley High School (EVHS) sophomore and JUNTOS member, Dulce Avitia. This remark was in response to a question from Josephine (Jo) Zamora, the facilitator for the up-coming JUNTOS Youth Summit on May 28-29<sup>th</sup>. Jo is a nationally-known facilitator who has her own consulting business, Total Business Solutions based out of Albuquerque. She is a product of the Española Valley and a graduate of EVHS. Friday, April 11<sup>th</sup> at Northern New Mexico College (NNMC) was Jo’s first meeting with 14 JUNTOS youth and adults from Española, Pojoaque, and Los Alamos, who are planning and will be helping to facilitate the summit under Jo’s guidance. Jo had asked this question of everyone, “Now that you are approaching the one-year anniversary of JUNTOS, what has changed for you?” Other students talked about positive changes in perceptions about the other communities, developing friendships, better understanding among cultures, being honest, stepping out of comfort zones, and just having fun.

JUNTOS is a grass-roots effort begun in the spring of 2007 by adult leaders from Los Alamos and Española who wanted to start a joint youth leadership program in order to “build bridges” between the Valley and the Hill. Youth (9<sup>th</sup> grade through college) from both communities met for the first time on May 29, 2007. They discussed the stereotypes and prejudices each had of the other and made a list of what they might do to break down the existing barriers and find a new way of relating. Over the last year, JUNTOS youth sponsored a workshop on racism and white privilege, and another workshop on teambuilding; they hosted rotating meetings at the local colleges (NNMC and UNM-LA) and high schools (EVHS and LAHS), and now are reaching out to youth from McCurdy High School and Pojoaque High School.

The young people chose the name JUNTOS, which stands for “Joining & Understanding Now, Teens Overcome Separation.” (“Juntos” also means “joining together” in Spanish.) At the teambuilding workshop on February 23<sup>rd</sup>, the youth developed their vision statement, “JUNTOS, a youth-driven initiative to create a new future through unity, by embracing and valuing all people, communities, and cultures.”

Preparations are well under way for the Youth Summit, an overnight at the wonderful El Rito campus of NNMC on May 28-29<sup>th</sup>. Jo Zamora will use her expertise to train several of the youth at be facilitators during the two-day event. JUNTOS plans to recruit up to 60 youth and 20 adults for this free event that will promote JUNTOS’s vision of bringing people of different cultures together. The summit will include speakers on cultural histories, food, art, music, games, skits, a camp fire, and a plan to assist youth to become agents for positive change. After assisting the youth in planning the summit agenda, Jo expressed her enthusiasm in working on this project. “These young people are amazing!”

More information about JUNTOS and an application for the youth summit will be available soon at the local colleges and high schools, and on-line at [www.losalamosjjab.com](http://www.losalamosjjab.com). You can also contact Lori Heimdahl Gibson at [lorihg@swcp.com](mailto:lorihg@swcp.com) to be put on the email list.

JUNTOS is supported in part by Los Alamos Juvenile Justice Advisory Board, NNM United Way, NNM ENLACE/GEAR-UP, SOC Los Alamos (formerly PTLA), the YMCA, and area schools. If you are interested in supporting this initiative, please contact Lori Heimdahl Gibson.