

# La Opinión

## Children in Foster Care Dream Big

Young Latina, Angel Velasquez visits the White House and presents her short film “Time for Change” to President Obama.



Angel Velasquez, participated in Kids in the Spotlight program, which works with the Los Angeles County Department of Children & Family Services.

By: Jacqueline Garcia

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In the Short Film titled “Time for Change”, Angel Velasquez portrays a peasant who dreams of having equal rights. In real life, the 18 year old fights to stand out despite growing up in the foster care system.

Velazquez informs *La Opinión* that since she was a few weeks old her parents started to have problems. As a result, she lived with her maternal grandmother in East Los Angeles. Within five years, this temporary home became her permanent home.

Over the years this youth fought to become a role model and she has succeeded. She graduated high school with honors and today she attends California State University Los Angeles (CSULA).

Her effort and dedication led her to fulfill one of her biggest dreams: to visit the White House to present her short film.

“I could not believe we were at the White House until we walked in,” said the youth still enthralled with excitement as she remembered her recent visit with the President of the United States, Barack Obama.

Her social worker Claudia Bustillos also celebrated the enormous step Velasquez has accomplished and said she could not contain her excitement.

“We prepare the youth for their independence and to see them accomplish their dreams fills us with happiness,” Bustillo said.

## The Project

A select group of foster youth including Velasquez participated in Kids in the Spotlight (KITS), a non-profit organization, to create a short film that eventually was presented at the White House first South By South film festival (SXSL).

KITS is a unique film program that works in conjunction with the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) to help foster youth express their feelings through their artistry.

The intensive four-week course led the group to write, direct and star in their own short film, said the president of KITS, Tige Charity.

“My job consists of providing an outlet for children to express themselves and a platform where they can shine. And there’s no better place to shine than in the White House!” she added.

“Time for Change” was one of 20 finalist from more than 700 films that were submitted at SXSL that took place on October 2nd in Washington D.C.

“When I saw him, I could not believe it,” Velasquez said referring to President Obama. “But when he started speaking, I recognized his voice and I said Wow! It is him.”

Velasquez says that although her plans are not defined she does not want to leave her 68 year old grandmother alone.

“When I told my grandmother we were going to Washington D.C., she thought that I was leaving forever,” the youth said sadly. “But when I explained what was going on she got excited and she started to tell everyone that I was going to the White House.”

Upon her return, Velasquez said her best friend mentioned that she seemed changed.

I started to laugh and said, “I haven’t changed, it’s just [being there] gives you a different perspective and you want to do so much more,” the youth said with a smile.

Her social worker, Bustillos, said she cannot contain her excitement to see the confused and timid girl she once knew achieve such great goals.

“She is a very motivated person and has very good grades,” she said.

“KITS has enabled these youth to achieve something very impressive; create custom films, said Philip L. Browning, Director of DCFS. We are very proud of what these young people have achieved and we hope that their message of change was well received by the White House.”

Velasquez said that in her short visit to Washington D.C. she met many interesting people and this has led her to firmly believe that there are no obstacles that she cannot overcome.

“Although I don’t have an easy life, I can truly do whatever I want,” she asserted.

Translated by: Rita Eustaquio, MSW Intern

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