



Maria Guzman, Pacoima Beautiful Volunteer

Maria Guzman didn't set out to be a full-time fighter for environmental health. All she wanted to do was play an active role in her son's education, make sure he had a bright college-bound future. She became active at his elementary school, Pacoima Charter, through their on-site parent center and learned about child development, parent-student communication, and resources and opportunities in the Pacoima community.

And she learned something else—about the possible links between concentrations of local pollution and her young son's health as he struggled with a serious asthma condition.

Pacoima Beautiful, the only environmental justice organization in the Northeast San Fernando Valley, visited the parent center with a presentation about the cumulative impact of all the pollution sources concentrated in the Pacoima community. Maria believes that it was this presentation that made her realize why her son of age 4 had a special case of asthma. She had no idea that it was the combination of pollutants in her backyard that were likely to be making him sick.

Pacoima Beautiful staff described the combination of three surrounding freeways, seven active landfills, diesel emissions, a private airport, and toxic work sites in the community and how that had contributed to asthma for many children in the community. They offered a chance to become involved through Pacoima Beautiful's Community Inspectors Program, in which community residents volunteer and actively engage with governmental offices to work on ways to alleviate the impacts of pollution concentrations.

"I became more cognizant of my surroundings, and knew that I wanted to get more involved to solve these problems in order to help future generations of Pacoima." – Maria Guzman

Maria became one of the parents who, along with Pacoima Beautiful staff, the Southern California Air Quality Management District, and professors from Occidental College went "ground-truthing" in Pacoima. Ground-truthing means collecting information on the ground that public agencies or other officials might have missed.

The Pacoima ground-truthers used P-track (particle counting) tools to log the particulate matter from diesel emissions found in the air. Maria was very surprised to see how much pollution was found in the Pacoima community air, and even more inspired to continue volunteering.

Two years after following this experience, Maria was hired by Pacoima Beautiful as a health promoter and community organizer. She helped to develop Pacoima Beautiful's membership base to the highest number of active members it has ever had. Together with her leadership, Pacoima Beautiful joined the Clean Up Green Up Campaign to make a land use policy in Pacoima, Wilmington, and Boyle Heights to reduce and prevent local pollution. Wilmington and Boyle Heights ground-truth teams also used the P-track tool to measure pollution in their communities. That research helped shape the Clean Up Green Up policy.

Maria's doctor recommended that she move out of Pacoima to improve her son's health. Maria and her family moved to a nearby community that has less pollution, but she continues to be part of the Pacoima Beautiful and the community team.

For more information contact info@cleanupgreenupla.org or visit www.cleanupgreenupla.com