

StoryCorps interview at the Santa Ana Public Library

"I think it makes a difference because where the wave crashes, you could be the rocks or you could be the sand..."

Library Tutor Elizabeth Campos talks with her colleague Zulma Zepeda about her experiences volunteering at the Santa Ana Public Library and her approach to working with library patrons. We hear first from Zulma.

Zulma Zepeda: When did you first come to the library?

Elizabeth Campos: I was a fourth grader, I had recently moved to Santa Ana. I had a cousin that I was going to school with and she had a library card, and I'm like, I need a library card. There are so many resources I should be using. They have that many books, and there's movies! I ended up moving across the street from the library, so that brought me even closer to it.

ZZ: And then you started volunteering a lot.

EC: Yes, that was in high school, right? So I spent a lot of my time at the library mostly working with youth.

ZZ: How do you see your role in the library and in Santa Ana?

EC: You know, Santa Ana's a troubled community, I would say. There's a lot of things out there that would stress out a kid, a teen. And that's kind of sad to think of, that at such a young age, you have to be exposed to things that would literally tear you apart. But the library was a kind of sanctuary. These kids are really resilient against tough odds, and they're still pulling through it, they're not giving up.

What I learned with the adults was that it's never too late to change the path you're on; it's never too late to work on yourself. We get a lot of people who come in for housing applications and jobs, and people working on resumes who haven't really been taught how to do those things growing up. Or even the Internet—to us it seems like a simple, user-friendly thing. To some people, it's just like, truthfully, I'm lost—please help me. They just need the kindness. People were like, no one has treated me like this before.

ZZ: Every time I talk to you, I always come away with a whole different view to kind of go out there again and face people again. I think it makes a difference because where the wave crashes, you could be the rocks or you could be the sand. So it could be easy, or you could make it more difficult. And it's already rough, and it doesn't cost you anything to be a nice person.

EC: Yeah.

ZZ: So now you're working here. It's been wonderful to see you grow, and so active, and you're here all the time.

EC: I live at the library. That is the ongoing joke with literally anyone that's here. Living so close to the library has allowed me to see the patrons that we serve not only as our patrons, but also as my neighbors. And so a lot of the concerns that come from the patrons resonate a little bit more with me, I have a little bit more empathy for it. It's given me a bigger sense of community in my workplace. It's so much easier to work here. I love what I do.