

Character in *ACTION*

Claudia Rodriguez: Someone Who Cares

Claudia's mom first saw the advertisement in a Spanish language newspaper in Framingham, Massachusetts. The advertisement told of an AmeriCorps-sponsored workshop to train 100 teenagers in leadership skills and community service. Claudia sent in her application and was one of the teenagers chosen to go to Fort Devens, Massachusetts, in the summer when she was 16.

During the leadership training, Claudia worked with a team of 10 kids from New Mexico, Puerto Rico, Utah, and Texas. Together they surveyed, planned, and set up a meeting for minority business owners to find out how crime and safety affected them. After surveying more than 150 people, Claudia and her friends provided information to businesses about alarm systems and other safety measures.

At the end of her AmeriCorps training, Claudia was one of only two teens chosen to attend a Summer

of Safety National Forum. She received more training there and returned home drenched in enthusiasm.

That's when her mom told her about a problem at the day-care center where she worked. All day long, Mrs. Rodriguez explained, kids from a nearby housing project would press their noses against the windows of the center, knocking and begging to use the playground. But the playground was always locked, and only children whose parents paid for day care were allowed to use it.

"That's when it hit me," Claudia remembers. "I had really developed my leadership skills and a desire to serve by helping those small businesses. So I went to a teacher at Framingham High School and made a proposal for an after-school Esperanza program for those children living in the low-income housing project." Claudia received lots of support from about 20 other teens in a service club at the high school.



Claudia Rodriguez (far right) on Cultural Day