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O.C. Youth Conference Promotes Unity

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IRVINE, Calif. (CBS) —

Culture, identity, violence and relationships -- all those issues and more topped the agenda at an annual youth conference in Orange County this afternoon. NewsCentral's Melissa Mecija has more from Irvine.

High school junior Ramiro Gonzalez sees it every day.

"Discrimination against not only race, but sexual orientation and gender."

That's just one of the topics students tackled at the Walk in My Shoes Youth Conference held at UC Irvine.

"Why the title 'walk in my shoes' is to teach empathy to show students that you know, some things that you do might be funny to you, it's not funny if you're on the receiving end of it."

Students today are faced with challenges that go far beyond the classroom. The Centers for Disease Control shows about 10 percent of teens have been in abusive relationships, another 18 percent have carried a weapon to school.

Thursday more than 500 high school students from two dozen schools in Orange County decided not to be a part of the problem, but instead be part of the solution.

"We follow all the stereotypes and buy into them because we're not aware of what the truth is. So I think that by being here we can educate and learn the truth," said the event's coordinator, Dave Southern.

While it's near impossible to reach every teen, organizers hope they learn at least one lesson that they literally wear on their sleeves.

The motto of this conference -- "Hate is easy, but love takes courage."

The nonprofit organization, O.C. Human Relations," hosted this 21st annual event.

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