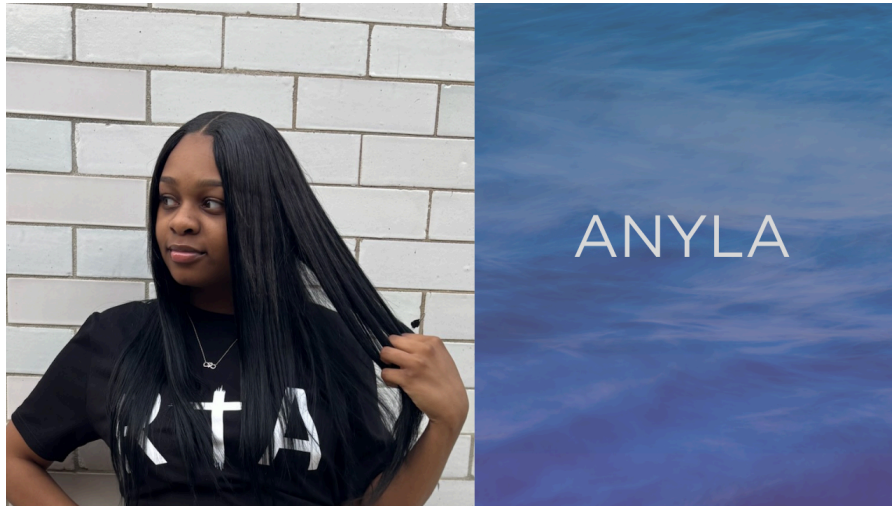


To&Through Student Stories



South Chicago

South Chicago is a predominantly Black (70%), lakefront neighborhood located on the far southeast side of Chicago right along the Illinois/Indiana border. Latine residents make up an additional 23% of the population. Youth make up a significant part of the population and most children attend public schools.

The South Chicago Quality of Life Plan envisions revitalizing vacant land, improving parks and transportation, and restoring the natural environment as a way to address longstanding issues of disinvestment of community spaces and air, water, and soil pollution.

Learn more:

[Quality of Life Plan - CLARETIAN ASSOCIATES - BUILDING COMMUNITY IN SOUTH CHICAGO](#)

[Claretian Associates](#)

[To&Through Community Tool](#)

Meet Anyla

Anyla is a student at Gary Comer College Prep (Comer College Prep). She was born and raised in South Chicago, with her extended family by her side. Anyla's dreams for South Chicago are to open more businesses to help residents build community with one another and invest in more programs that center youth interests, including career and employment opportunities.

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Anyla has overcome a lot in her young age. Middle school was overwhelming at times and she was excited to graduate. As she enters high school, she is hopeful about this new chapter in her life.

Middle School Memories

Anyla's transition into middle school was difficult. She was in fourth grade when the Covid-19 pandemic hit and Chicago Public Schools entered into fully remote learning. She struggled to focus and engage with virtual class.

In fifth grade she returned to in-person learning. Throughout the rest of her middle school years, she struggled with a negative relationship with a teacher and bullying from classmates.

"I used to be such a sweet person before."

These experiences would stay with her throughout the rest of middle school.

She struggled with emotional regulation which manifested into a behavioral record. She tried her best to "get her life together" but continued to hit roadblocks. Although school staff offered their support, she felt disconnected and alone in her struggles.

"Eighth grade was a lot. I tried to do better but something bad happened and it left me with a lot of backlash...I'm so drained from it. I've already been through so many stages in my life."

She was ready to move on from middle school and start fresh in high school.

"I'm excited about meeting new people, [to] do dance [team] again, cheer, and be a good scholar."

Her main support team throughout her life has been her family. When asked who the first person she'll go to when she needs support is, she immediately responded: "My sister. Of course." She clarifies that she loves all of her siblings but she has a close bond with her older sister. "I'm so used to being around my sister. A party? We both go. A sleepover? We both go. My sister encourages me the most." She can also count on her mom, auntie, siblings, and others in her household. They have always encouraged her to "get your education and be something good in life". Other than school staff, a student's family provides influential guidance during the educational journeys of their child.

Anyla is still considering her career options after she graduates high school. She really wants to be a cosmetologist but also considers entering into the medical field.

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Relationship with South Chicago

Anyla grew up in a multigenerational household in South Chicago. Her family members would take her and her siblings to the aquarium and downtown for Winter Wonderfest in Navy Pier. But for Anyla, some of her favorite memories include going on “breakfast dates” in South Chicago with her mom and older sister.

For Anyla, South Chicago is home and cannot imagine herself anywhere else.

“I just love being here. It’s like, I’m used to being here and I grew up here so it’s like I only want to be here and with the people and stuff.”

Hopes for South Chicago

Anyla’s favorite thing to do in South Chicago is go on friend dates to McDonalds or Chipotle. She hopes the neighborhood can continue to open more spaces and restaurants for neighbors to have something to do, hang out, or eat at.

Anyla’s vision for South Chicago includes a vibrant community, opportunities for youth, and safety rooted in trust.

She also envisions more community programs that center youth interests in employment and career pathways including photography, nursing, and cosmetology.

Finally, she hopes for a “safe neighborhood for the kids”. She believes in increasing safety through strong interpersonal relationships rooted in trust. Anyla explains that trust requires community members to overcome “their fears of what they think can happen and step out of their bubble...and meet new people” Strong interpersonal relationships is the basis for planning and executing plans to improve the neighborhood.

Anyla’s Hopes for the Field

- **Family relationships are the conduit for community connection.** Anyla extended family helped raise her and provide ongoing support in her life. She cannot imagine living anywhere else.
- **Young people want spaces to be in community with one another.** Anyla’s vision for South Chicago includes investing in local community spaces and businesses that give neighbors the opportunity to come together and break bread. Strong relationships rooted in trust is how to increase safety in the community, according to Anyla.

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- **Young people value employment and career programs and opportunities.** She also envisions more community programs that center youth interests in employment and career pathways including photography, nursing, and cosmetology.