

UC San Diego



THE UC SAN DIEGO  
**COMMUNITY  
STATIONS**

PUBLIC SPACES THAT EDUCATE

# PUBLIC SPACES THAT EDUCATE



The UC San Diego Community Stations were established in 2015 as a network of public spaces located in vulnerable neighborhoods across the San Diego-Tijuana border region. At the stations, UC San Diego students and researchers meet with diverse community leaders to share knowledge and resources, shaping a unique model of university-community partnership for collaborative education, research and cultural activity.

For society to function as a better harmonized whole, we must dissolve the physical and institutional boundaries that stifle exchange. Communities and universities can break from silos and separation to partner meaningfully in the fight against poverty and social inequality. By bringing the knowledge of communities into university research and the knowledge of the university into communities, we create a two-way flow that increases agency and capacity all around.

The U.S.-Mexico border is the busiest land-border crossing in the western hemisphere, uniquely shaping our physical environment, commercial flows and uneven development. The UC San Diego Community Stations produce insights and solutions specific to our border context while offering a local model for others to replicate globally.

## OUR PROGRAM

- Animates the university's public mission, merging research, teaching and service to improve quality of life for disadvantaged communities across the San Diego-Tijuana border region
- Educates a new generation of leaders capable of thinking socially and collaboratively across disciplines, tackling today's most pressing challenges
- Advances experiential education, public research, civic participation and economic development in collaboration with community partners
- Affirms that architecture is an essential element of public service, promoting community health, connectivity and dignity through award-winning design
- Illustrates how universities can leverage foundation and philanthropic support, for communities to develop, own and manage their own neighborhood public space infrastructure



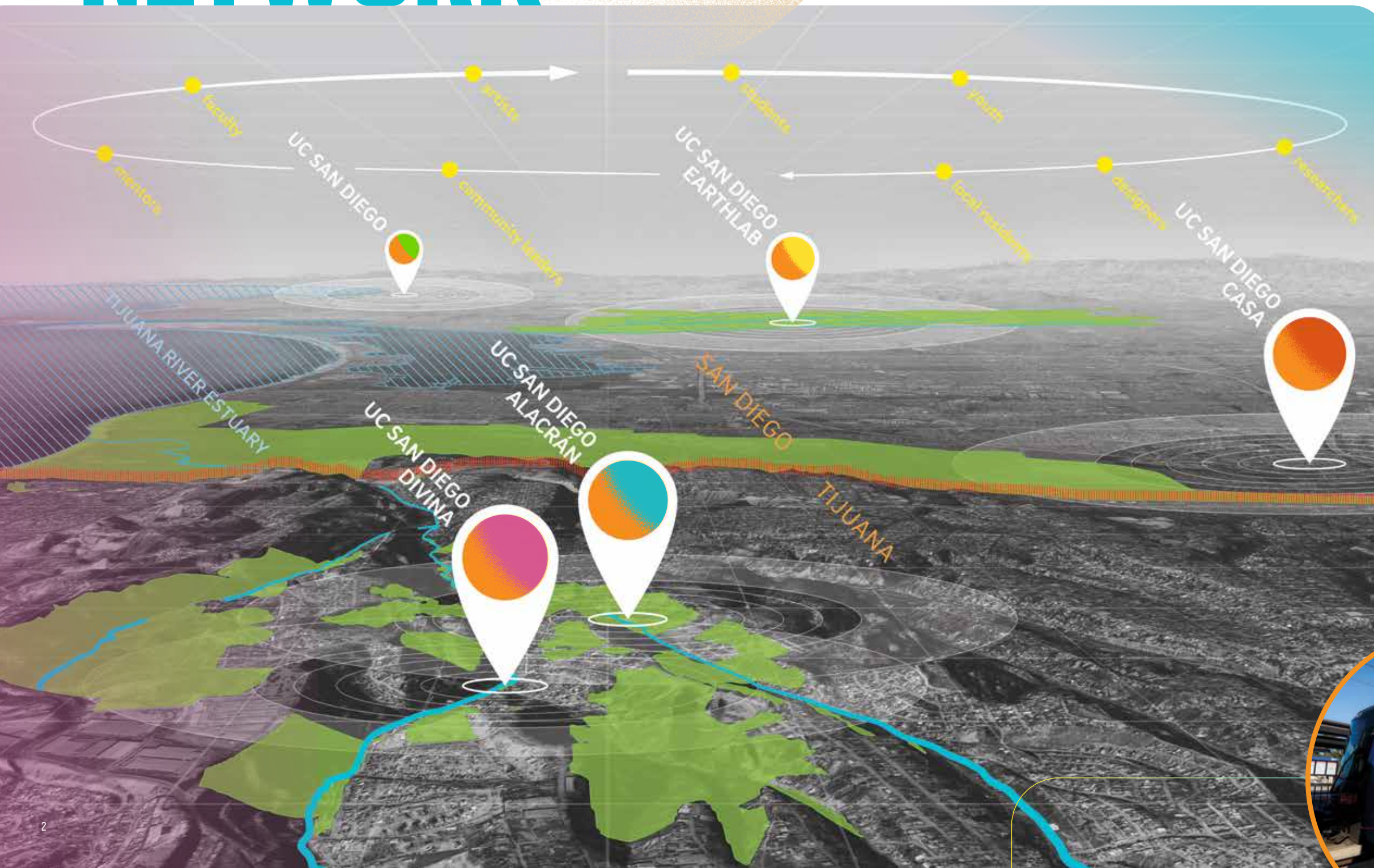
# OUR NETWORK

There are four UC San Diego Community Stations, two in San Diego and two in Tijuana. Each is led by an interdisciplinary team of university faculty in collaboration with a partner grassroots organization.

A model of community-university engagement informs each station: a commitment to coproducing high-impact research and education on poverty, diversity and social inclusion, together searching for solutions to deep social, environmental and economic challenges. Each station has its own set of projects designed by collaborating teams of university researchers, students and community partners. This programmatic architecture is complemented by physical infrastructure that supports place-based educational activities.

Through year-round courses, internships, and community-based programs and activities, the UC San Diego Community Stations enable long-term cooperation between members of the campus community and residents in our region, producing new understanding informed by their dynamic exchange.

The UC San Diego Blue Line Trolley Station connects the full network of Community Stations to our campus. In a region historically decentralized by sprawling freeways, our network offers an inspiring preview of a better-connected, better-integrated future.





# UC SAN DIEGO COMMUNITY STATIONS BRING THE INSIDE OUT AND THE OUTSIDE IN.



They can be thought of as a distributed campus, an infrastructure of physical spaces that connect UC San Diego with diverse communities of color. Arrayed around borders of all kinds. Where rigorous social sciences meet environmental justice. Where the arts and humanities meet the creative agency of communities in the margins.

The Community Stations are spaces where the production of knowledge reciprocates — a two-way flow of researchers, leaders and local youth. The specialized understanding of the university meets the local understanding of border neighborhoods. Community knowledge arrives at the university and enriches higher education. University knowledge enhances community capacities for self-determined change.

## EARTHLAB COMMUNITY STATION

The EarthLab includes a 4,000-square-foot STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts and math) Design Lab and a four-acre park for hands-on climate education. These interconnected indoor and outdoor spaces support a unique K-12 environmental curriculum. A lever for social, economic, energy and health equity, the project opens doors for higher education, career pathways, mentorship and green jobs.

### PARTNERSHIP

EarthLab is a partnership between UC San Diego and Groundwork San Diego-Chollas Creek, an environmental justice nonprofit organization. The organization is empowered by the City of San Diego to restore the Chollas Creek watershed, as well as the economy and quality of life for the residents of Encanto.

### LOCATION

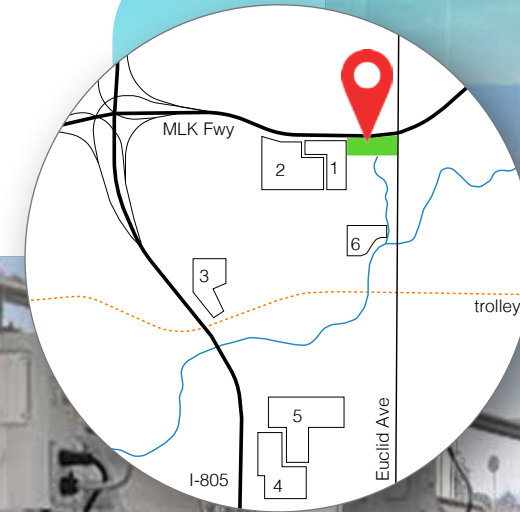
EarthLab is located in Southeast San Diego in the underserved neighborhood of Encanto, which is characterized by high unemployment, low educational attainment, food insecurity and cyclical poverty. The station occupies a large parcel owned by San Diego Unified School District and granted to EarthLab in order to increase capacity for the six public schools within walking distance of the site. Climate justice demands urgent investment in communities least responsible for but most impacted by climate change — with their susceptibility to extreme heat and flash flooding, Encanto and adjacent neighborhoods meet these criteria well.

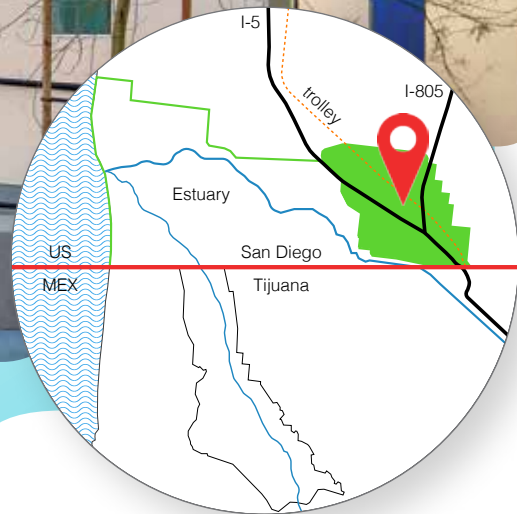
### RESEARCH ENDEAVOR

EarthLab's educational programming bridges the achievement gap in Encanto, engaging low-income youth to learn and act on the impacts of climate change in their own communities. It advances research on informal learning by moving kids beyond the four walls of the school and into green spaces, promoting resilience strategies and opportunities for participatory climate action. This endeavor is framed by Bending the Curve, a comprehensive collection of educational materials curated by leading climate researchers across the University of California.

### PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

EarthLab is designed by informal science educators, climate action scientists, environmental designers, architects and landscape architects. A Climate Design Lab and a Climate Action Park form an integrated ecology of spaces dedicated to climate education, an exemplary model for linking indoor and outdoor learning zones for experiential science, environmental humanities, socio-emotional empathy and well-being. San Diego Unified School District has committed \$10 million toward construction of the site, part of a larger vision to modernize Millennial Tech Middle School and connect it to the EarthLab, opening career pathways for the next generation of thinkers and doers in the green economy.





## CASA COMMUNITY STATION

The CASA Community Station is located in the border neighborhood of San Ysidro and housed at Living Rooms at the Border, a unique affordable housing project that was leveraged by this initiative and integrates affordable housing with spaces for social, economic, cultural and educational activities. It provides a cultural platform for collaboration between UC San Diego and our nonprofit community partner Casa Familiar to codevelop arts and cultural programming for the San Ysidro community.

### LOCATION

The CASA Community Station is located in walking distance from the San Ysidro Port of Entry, the most heavily trafficked border checkpoint in the western hemisphere. Changes to border infrastructure and political restrictions impact the volume of traffic and its accompanying pollution, affecting the health and daily experiences of residents.

### PARTNERSHIP

The CASA Community Station is a partnership with Casa Familiar, a robust 30-year-old community-based organization dedicated to improving the experience of those living in San Ysidro by empowering residents to take an active role in the future planning of their community.

### RESEARCH ENDEAVOR

The CASA Community Station advances immigrant neighborhoods like San Ysidro as laboratories for new civic infrastructure. Educational programs focus on arts and culture as tools to increase urban literacy about environmental justice, affordable housing and public space, air quality and health, and cross-border citizenship.

Coproduced arts and culture programs promote reciprocity and artistic exchange between the university and community. UC San Diego students, researchers, curators and cultural producers come to San Ysidro to coproduce works and performances with members of the community. San Ysidro youth, cultural *promotoras*, local artists and community leaders come to UC San Diego to inform university humanities research agendas and priorities.

### PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Affordable housing takes on a different meaning and significance when threaded into spaces for social programming, creating an integrated socio-spatial system. The CASA Community Station completed construction in February 2020. The station adapted an abandoned historic church into a community theater and added small pavilions for social and health services, and an open-air civic porch for arts and culture. This \$9 million project illustrates our unique model of shared urban development, synergizing community, university, philanthropic and foundation economic resources.



## DIVINA COMMUNITY STATION

Located in Tijuana, the Divina Community Station is the civic anchor for the under-developed neighborhood of Divina Providencia. It is dedicated to increasing local and disciplinary knowledge about cross-border environmental challenges and expanding public awareness of the social-ecological linkages between the U.S. and Mexico.

### LOCATION

The Divina Community Station is situated in Los Laureles Canyon, an informal settlement of 90,000 people on the periphery of Tijuana. Laureles is known as Latin America's "last slum," crashing against the U.S.-Mexico border fence. Its proximity to San Diego's Tijuana River Estuarine Reserve makes this station the perfect site for researching new strategies for transnational, bioregional interdependence. Through long-standing trusted partnerships, students enjoy a level of access to the international context unavailable in conventional U.S.-based global poverty programs.

### PARTNERSHIP

The Divina Community Station is a partnership with Colonos de la Divina Providencia, a civil association dedicated to promoting community participation in environmental challenges and local economic development. Divina facilitates government-sponsored programs such as low-cost meals, free medical assistance, and senior and youth programming.

### RESEARCH ENDEAVOR

Focusing on cross-border green infrastructure, Divina Community Station research emphasizes the shared environmental interests between San Diego and Tijuana. Through hands-on educational activities, local youth understand zones of social risk and habitat vulnerability in their own neighborhoods, coproducing community-based data to advocate for responsive binational environmental policy. Drawing Tijuana residents into the cross-border regional story, programming at the Divina Community Station inspires a sense of greater local agency in a larger region dominated by U.S. economic interests.

### PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

The Divina Community Station site plan includes a 24,000-square-foot structure, conceived as a large, trellis-like, flexible space to mediate indoor and outdoor activities. It houses social and economic incubator spaces, art and science fabrication labs, a small environmental high school, and a variety of spaces for informal markets and community events.





## ALACRÁN COMMUNITY STATION

The Alacrán Community Station is located in the Alacrán Canyon, a precarious informal settlement near the border wall in Tijuana. It is part of a migrant shelter that has become refuge to thousands of Mexican, Haitian and Central American migrants, fleeing violence, poverty and the agricultural instability caused by climate change. The station increases migrant housing capacity for the shelter and develops social programs that are managed collaboratively between the university and the migrant community. It is now the largest refugee sanctuary in the entire US-Mexico border region.

### PARTNERSHIP

The Alacrán Community Station is a partnership with Embajadores de Jesús, a religious organization, that launched a small shelter to provide housing, food and basic services to the first wave of Haitian refugees who arrived at the border in 2016. It is now the largest migrant shelter in the entire border region, supporting thousands of refugees during their prolonged asylum processes in both the U.S. and Mexico

### LOCATION

The Community Station is located within Alacrán Canyon, the most precarious and polluted sub-basin in a network of canyons in Tijuana, whose topography is dissected by the U.S.-Mexico border wall. The refugee shelter where the station is housed sits 30 minutes from our campus, demonstrating the dramatic proximity of wealth and extreme poverty in our region.

### RESEARCH ENDEAVOR

Fast becoming a nexus for migrant support, research and outreach by many units across the UC San Diego campus, the Alacrán Community Station focuses campus research and education on the public health challenges of migrants; and the role of social impact investment to support incremental migrant housing; and sustainable, sanctuary neighborhood infrastructure and programming. UC San Diego participants in the project include the Herbert Wertheim School of Public Health and Human Longevity Science, the School of Medicine, the School of Social Sciences, and many more.

### PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

The Alacrán Community Station embeds emergency housing within an infrastructure of spaces promoting social and economic well-being. The station began construction in March 2020, and has now become the seed for an evolving sanctuary neighborhood, equipped with a health clinic, a sports court, a hydroponic farm, a large food hub, and industrial kitchen and construction workshops operated by the immigrant community. We have partnered with a local factory, or *maquiladora*, to adapt its prefabricated light metal shelving systems into structural frameworks for housing.





# ON THE GROUND SPOTLIGHT EXPERIENCES



## **EARTHLAB COMMUNITY STATION: CLOSING THE CIRCLE**

### **Meet Nashaya Ross**

Nashaya (Shay) Ross '18 grew up in Encanto. She came to UC San Diego to study biology and health, the recipient of a four-year Chancellor's Associates Scholar award, which is designed to support low-income students from our community. As an intern at the EarthLab Community Station, Shay returned to her neighborhood and worked as a youth environmental mentor with children from the elementary schools of her childhood.

Shay's experience closed the circle. While communities like hers often suffer the effects of disinvestment and the flight of talent, Shay returned as a role model and steward of the community's future.



## **CASA COMMUNITY STATION: BORDER POLLUTION—A SHARED HAZARD**

### **Meet Anika Ullah**

As an undergraduate majoring in human biology and visual arts, Anika Ullah '18 explored air quality challenges at the border.

Anika and her fellow students visited the backyard of Anibal Cornejo, a San Ysidro resident, who showed them his lemon grove. Every lemon in his trees was coated with black silt, toxic evidence of the impact from tens of thousands of cars idling in wait to cross the border only a few blocks away. The lemons became the subject for a mini-documentary, through which Anika explored the intersection of science, community health and activism through data-driven, multimedia storytelling to increase community capacity for political action.



## **ALACRÁN COMMUNITY STATION: COMMITMENT TO MIGRANT HEALTH**

### **Meet Aliyah Annis**

Aliyah Annis '23 began her internship at the Alacrán Community Station after working in community organizing and nonprofits. At Alacrán, she was part of two teams focused on providing a safe educational space for migrant children living at the shelter while also considering social, political and ecological solutions for Alacrán's communities.

Mostly ranging in age between 7-12, children in the groups participated in expressive lessons aimed to nurture their understanding of health and the environment. A game called "Plant VS Zombie" taught the difference between the organic life they'd encounter and toxins that threatened their health. Composting showed connections between food, ecology and the life of the community, as many of the children's mothers worked to prepare communal meals. A community-led planting of Yucca trees showed the impact of needed greenery and shade neighboring Alacrán's playground.

Aliyah's experiences at Alacrán renewed her commitment to a future in immigration law and prompted her to process her personal connections to the work.

"I come from an immigrant community in Salinas and wanted to give back to communities like mine," she said. She added, "I can take classes on government or the sociology of migration, but being there with everyone is what's most fulfilling – it's soul-driven work."



## **DIVINA COMMUNITY STATION: CROSS-BORDER CITIZEN**

### **Meet Jonathan Padilla**

Jonathan Gonzalez Padilla '18 is a true representative of our binational region, having rotated living and schooling in San Diego and Tijuana his entire life. He was placed with the Divina Community Station in 2017.

Simultaneous exploration of the Tijuana River Estuary revealed evidence of inconsistent sanitation in the form of mounds of garbage, netted on the U.S. side of the border through overflows of the Tijuana River. Jonathan reports spotting packaging familiar from his childhood in the debris, a stark lesson in how far our ecological impact can range.

Since graduating, Jonathan has deepened his identification as a binational citizen and worker. He enrolled in medical school at the Universidad Autonoma de Baja California (UABC) and is now an intern at Excel Medical Center in Tijuana, treating patients from both sides of the border. Jonathan credits his experience at Divina Community Station with reinforcing the value of plurality in his experience as well as its distinction in our binational region generally.

# A COMMUNITY OF GLOBAL CHANGEMAKERS

Beyond the direct impacts felt by the populations immediately served by the UC San Diego Community Stations, the program inspires faculty across disciplines to conduct ethical, community-engaged research and practice in diverse, underserved contexts. Experiential learning opportunities reach past the boundaries of our campus, accompanied by new field-based curricula placing students in actual community settings.

Ranging beyond the usual academic territory, the stations mobilize the arts and humanities as tools of civic engagement, increasing public knowledge and collective capacity. Unique methods of inquiry produce new evidentiary data that can transform public policy. Perhaps most powerful of all, communities become equipped to develop their own neighborhood civic infrastructure and organize effectively for vital basic needs like affordable housing.



## FOSTERING A CULTURE OF CROSS-BORDER CITIZENSHIP

Partners who share our vision for vibrant, productive connections between university and community can support the UC San Diego Community Stations in a variety of ways. Construction and remodeling costs for all four projects have been largely secured, with attention turning now to:

### RESOURCING OUR CENTRAL CORE

While each community station has its own unique character and focus, the central UC San Diego Community Stations program is vital for identifying and connecting students and faculty to specific initiatives, enabling campus groups to bring educational activities and performances to community stations, and enhancing the visibility of the program and its impacts as a choreographed whole.

### SPECIFIC PROJECTS AT INDIVIDUAL STATIONS

True to the rich variety of communities making up our San Diego-Tijuana border region, each community station hosts different programs in alignment with different community partners. Partners focused on specific outcomes have the opportunity to invest in discrete, fixed-term projects where longer-term aspirations are aligned.

A better future is one we construct together, the sum transcending its parts.



At UC San Diego, we believe that what we don't know today will forever change our tomorrows. Empowered by generosity and fueled by curiosity, we are unafraid to chase the unknown — to ask the questions no one has asked before and to push the boundaries of possibility.

Together, we unite diverse people and unconventional perspectives to propel limitless impact. Because we know that when we come together, nothing is beyond us.



*Learn more about how you can support the UC San Diego Community Stations by scanning the code at left, visiting [communitystations.ucsd.edu](https://communitystations.ucsd.edu) or contacting James Vermillion at [jvermillion@ucsd.edu](mailto:jvermillion@ucsd.edu).*