

Comunidad!

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News About Latino Youth, Inc., Its People, Its Programs

Helping the Community Shape Its Own Future

In This Issue...

The Director's Corner 2

A High School with an Alternative 3

Stop The Violence! Student Voice 4

As Latino Youth, Inc. nears a quarter-century of service to the young people of our community, its programs are beginning to show the promise of youth matured. With a dedicated and ever more experienced group of staff and volunteers, we have reached out to help not only the children and adolescents of Pilsen, Little Village, and North Lawndale, but also their families. Together, we continue to work to build family and community in tandem.

Opened in 1974 as a community-based, licensed child welfare agency, Latino Youth now provides education, child care, leadership training, shelter, and counseling among its many offerings. As always, we continue to be guided by five basic principles: create a hopeful climate of high expectations and mutual respect and caring; ensure opportunities by helping youth develop leadership, responsibility and cultural pride; offer viable alternatives to the false choices of gangs, drugs and alcohol; advocate for the needs and concerns of our youth; and provide the support systems needed to reach all our objectives.

WELCOME TO OUR NEWSLETTER

You can read about one of our programs in this inaugural issue of our newsletter, and we hope in future issues to

speaking about all of the valuable services we provide. On page 3, read about the **Latino Youth Alternative High School** and its work to provide education to those who may have had trouble getting it elsewhere.

We hope you'll also take the time on your own to learn about all the other programs and services we offer. One of Latino Youth's major concerns has always been the issue of teen pregnancy, and the strains it adds to a community in terms of social services, poverty and family disunity. **Unidos Formando Un Futuro/Forming a Future Together**, offers support, advocacy and personal development training to adolescent parents. The main goal is to foster a solid parent-child bond despite the difficulties of early parenthood, by teaching the young parents to be supportive role models.

As part of its effort to help the community at large, not just the young people, Latino Youth also offers help with **Adult Education and Literacy**. In alliance with Chicago's Daley College, community adults are enrolling in programs that will gain them not only GED diplomas, but a more positive outlook towards their opportunities in today's competitive economy.

This is Latino Youth! A multiplicity of striving: youth, staff, volunteers, neighbors working together to create a community that cares for its own, can produce its own leaders, and replaces fatalism and pessimism with an optimistic, activist approach to shaping its own future.



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Carmen Aviles,
Executive Director



Executive Director Carmen Aviles and Latino Youth march to beat the drums for gang peace at the Stop the Violence March.

this is Latino Youth...



From the Director's Corner...

Latino Youth is ready for new challenges



“(Budget) changes may save government budgets, but do not make the societal problems or the needs of our youth go away. We are expected, by the community, to fill the vacuum that is created.”

Latino Youth is in a position no different than that of many other non-profit social service organizations in these years of cutbacks: we must constantly fight for our survival. However, it should not be seen as a struggle for our own existence, but as a fight for the important role organizations like ours play in the community. We see ourselves not just as providers of much needed services, important as that is, but as crucial advocates for those who have none. The community looks to us for leadership on many issues, and for development of many of the community's own leaders.

Those whose cause we seek to further most continues to be, in our 24th year, the young people of our community. Beset by the traditional threats of poverty and violence, and new threats of mean-spirited welfare and immigration “reforms”, they continue to provide hope for the future. These kids are not complacent, they retain a spirit that pushes them to better themselves and better their surroundings.

They need help in doing that, the kind of help we continue to provide. Latino Youth has a variety of programs that touch upon all of life's spheres. We provide guidance that will enable them to handle the educational, economic, cultural, emotional, social and spiritual challenges they will face. Above all, we concern ourselves with both their personal development and their leadership development. It is our overall goal of not only creating opportunities for Latino youth, but also of empowering youth who can actively take advantage of those opportunities, and who will then become active participants in the community and work to improve its general living conditions.

OUR RECIPE FOR SUCCESS

This is a large task for any organization, but we have faced it and prospered. We've undergone a transformation in the past three years, from an agency that grew quickly in the beginning, to one that is now formalizing its operations and looking seriously at how we do things, and upgrading our operations for greater efficiency. This is a not an undertaking that will affect the spirit of what we do, but instead help us do it better. Our theme for

this past fiscal year has been “The Recipe for Building Success Equals Pulling Together”, an approach that has allowed us to pull our various structures together to provide better quality services.

Our list of accomplishments in the last year, and our plans for the upcoming months, is witness to the continuing vibrancy of Latino Youth. One of our main goals was realized in June of 1997. The Latino Youth Alternative High School was recognized by the Illinois Board of Education as a private high school. This will allow us to hand out our own high school diplomas, recognized by the state of Illinois. The value of our education will not change, only the credit it will get.

OUR GROWTH CONTINUES

There will be some programs added, some will grow. We will expand our child welfare program. Latino Youth will be opening a residential building for wards of the state who need assistance as they move towards independence. We will continue working on the Children and Adolescent Local Area Networks for Pilsen and Little Village, a major success at child abuse and neglect prevention in the community. We are the principal funding agent for the program, budgeted at over \$300,000, and its co-convenor along with Mujeres Latinas en Acción.

To accommodate our expanding programs, we are in the process of acquiring new property. Our challenges are many. Cutbacks in federal and state programs, increased privatization and managed care, the changes in immigration and welfare policies. We are affected twice, our funding cut while our burden is added to. The changes may save government budgets, but do not make the societal problems or the needs of our youth go away. We are expected, by the community, to fill the vacuum that is created. We do so gladly, with pride, but we also need your help. Whether it be contributions or volunteer time, Latino Youth is always grateful for any part you can play in preparing our young people for the future.

Carmen Aviles



Drop out? No way! There's an alternative

When a kid drops out of high school, their choices are not very desirable. A future of factory or service industry work often awaits them, if they're lucky. In the worst cases, a life of involvement with drugs or gangs.

But for years, there's been a haven of hope on Marshall Boulevard, Latino Youth Alternative High School (LYAHS), a place where they can build self-respect and learn what it takes to succeed, in a strict but caring environment.

LYAHS wants its kids to shake off the negative tags such as "drop out." Here, they are treated as individuals in a group small enough to give that real meaning. They are instilled with pride in their Latino heritage, taught subjects that really matter to their future, and guided towards real advancement towards college or career life.

The school targets Pilsen and Little Village youth, 16 to 20, who have dropped out or otherwise been excluded from the public school system. It doesn't accept just any applicant, only those that show some motivation to mature and work towards a meaningful education. Today, it averages between 80 and 100 students, each given two years to complete the high school.

AN ENVIRONMENT FOR LEARNING

Once accepted, a student is given strict rules to abide by, but not clobbered with the petty enforcement they might find at other schools. When rules are broken, for example tardiness or absences, disrupting classes or wearing gang-related clothing, the consequences of their actions have been spelled out clearly ahead of time.

But except in the most extreme cases, students are first given the chance to learn and change. The rules are there to create a safe, respectable, gang-neutral environment, a major advantage over the often unruly public schools.

But the emphasis at LYAHS is on guidance. Students are required to meet with their Advisor twice a week, more if they wish. These

Advisors help them choose goals and monitor their progress towards them. A weekly Assembly is held, where students get a chance to speak their minds in an open forum between students and staff. Currently, the school has a staff of eight teachers, a registrar, a school coordinator and five workshop presenters.

This guidance is an important part of a much more personalized approach towards education than these students may have encountered at the often overcrowded public schools. There, they were a small part of a program geared towards "processing" and passing on thousands of students at a time. Here, they feel they are an important part of a program geared to ensure their success in life. The advantages are many. They are in smaller classes, with a student-to-teacher ratio average of 15:1, which allows for very personalized instruction when necessary.

CELEBRATING HERITAGE

The curriculum is also more likely to interest and help them. First of all, they are introduced to a Latino-centered curriculum they are unlikely to get at public schools, learning things about Latino history and culture they might otherwise never have. A glance at the school calendar, with days off to celebrate Mexican Independence Day and Dia de La Raza (as opposed to Columbus Day), shows just how important Latino heritage is at LYAHS.

Also, the whole emphasis on "School-to-Work" at LYAHS ensures students will be ready for the college or career world. Career counselors and a career resource center are available to help students identify possible careers, and internships are arranged. College preparation classes are given, where they can learn how to apply to colleges and helped to study for the ACT and SAT exams, the crucial tests for college admissions. An annual Latino Youth Career Fair is held, where students can meet Latino professionals, the role models they may never see on TV.

LYAHS has been a trailblazer among alternative schools, and is finally being recognized for the valuable education it brings to its students. The school program was recently recognized by the Illinois State Board of Education as a private high school, with the right to hand out its own high school diplomas.

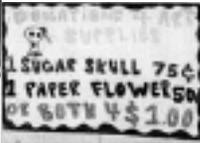
"(At LYAHS) the whole emphasis on 'School-to-Work'... ensures students will be ready for the college or career world."



Students from the High School participated in 1997's Leadership Conference at McCormick Place



this is Latino Youth...



Student Voice

Juvenile Violence

By Jose Gallardo

Juvenile violence is when teenagers commit crimes. This is a problem because teenagers are supposed to have fun and start building up their future for themselves. Instead, the only future that these teenagers build for themselves is either a prison or a grave. We should never ignore this problem because innocent people always get killed. If we turn our backs on this dilemma it will just get worse because juvenile violence will influence other kids to do the same.

I first noticed juvenile violence when I moved into the new house that my father had bought nine years ago. Due to the fact that I lived right on the borderline between two rival gangs, I realized how much juvenile violence there was in my neighborhood. There was shooting going on at least three times a week, mostly by little kids on bikes. For some reason, I got influenced into the gang, ignoring the danger and consequences that came right along with it. I saw the shooting, the stabbing, the fighting, the car jacking. I even saw someone get murdered right in front of me, but that still didn't stop me from joining a gang at age 12. That's because I was too young to understand.

Two years ago, juvenile violence had a tremendous effect on my life. One of my best friends had decided to go and shoot at rival gang members on his bike. Not knowing that an off-duty police officer was nearby when he shot at the rival gang members caused him his life. The police officer shot and killed my best friend. He was only fifteen years old. This incident caused me to think more and stop causing trouble.

There's only one thing that can prevent juvenile violence from happening. And that's to give these kids something to do like playing sports. Have the parents get involved and have fun with their kids before it is too late. You'll be surprised at how many kids join a gang just because they have nothing better to do.

Student Art by Edgar Montoya



Meet...the Latino Youth, Inc. Board of Directors

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