



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF ANNE ARUNDEL COUNTY
 Myrna Siegel, President Anne Nelson, Co-President

**FOCUS GROUP ON AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMMING FOR CHILDREN
 OF MIDDLE SCHOOL AGE, ROUGHLY 11 TO 14 YEARS OLD
 October 15, 2009**

Participants were representatives of public & private community groups.

SCHOOLS

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RECREATION & PARKS

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VOLUNTEER GROUPS

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Proceedings

Anne Nelson welcomed participants and thanked them for joining the discussion of programming for this age group of Hispanic/Latino students. She described the need for more attention to this age group as it appears to have become a target for gang recruiting. Activities are needed after school that will engage them and keep them out of gangs.

After introductions, the invited representatives described what programs they sponsor, which one are they most proud of, and whether Latino students participate.

Dept. of Recreation & Parks

Speaker 1, Coordinator of Health & Aquatics distributed a list of the programs offered at the Stanton Center and at the Recreation Center. Stanton programs are free. Those at the Recreation Center have fees. Unlisted was the frequency of the programs and the costs, but several at the Recreation Center have scholarships.

Participation of Latino children is low, but it is hoped that their participation will increase at the new center at Truxten Park. The department does not keep data on ethnicity. She is not certain if language is a barrier, as she does not speak Spanish. Programs run out of the schools have better attendance. Transportation is not an issue. Mighty Milers (3rd-5th grade) however, has good participation, and will be expanded to middle school this year.

Schools

Speaker 2, Coordinator of ESOL, noted that ESOL has outreach to extend the school day and to teach and guide parents, especially of elementary level children. His staff members have found that to strengthen English learning, it is first necessary to build skill in Spanish in both the parents and children, providing the parents a facility for speaking to their children. His program now has 12 bilingual community outreach facilitators who offer Hispanic education forums which are well attended, thereby supplying a connection between home and school.

Old Mill High School, the night before, held a program for parents that was a success.

Speaker 3, ESOL Family and Community Outreach Specialist, stated that they run an International Student College Fair for middle and high school children and parents across the county. The Fair provides an introduction to college preparation to both middle and high school students. This Fair has parent conferences twice a year.

We also collaborate with community organizations to run Hispanic Education Forums. Maria Casasco from AACDSS speaks to provide a long range framework. . These forums are offered twice a semester in various areas of the county. Child care and refreshments are provided. There are workshops and we explain about getting children through school. Interpreters are there. We also offer night programs for learning English and learning about the U.S. school system. There are Parent Involvement conferences twice per year, with breakout sessions specifically in Spanish for Latinos. We find that elementary school parents have the best attendance. We do hold many of the classes in elementary schools, but middle school

students are also part of those families. Several middle schools are offering outreach programs for Latino students and parents. Hispanic/Latino attendance at school activities compares well with other ethnic groups, but programs are targeted to them. Sessions are held in nearby schools to which parents and children can walk. Sometimes parents want their children at home.

Speaker 4, Registrar, International Student Office, stated they do the initial placement of students. She and a colleague run a grant program working with middle school children on gang prevention. Abandonment is an issue for Latino children, who may have been left behind when parents first came. They are often left with grandparents when their parents come to America. In these circumstances, the child does not see his father or mother as a parent. They liked their grandparents and do not see why they have to be with parents. They may have been sexually abused by family in the old country. Instability occurs when they rejoin their parents and find the father may have started another family here. He will have a wife and a girl friend. Children may find their mother with a new husband. The children are pretty sure to feel anger toward a new family. They may be living with parents here but both parents are working long hours, and the children are on their own. These children have abandonment issues, often expressed as anger and lack of self-discipline. These emotions show why kids are attracted to gangs. We have workshops on school safety where we talk about gangs. We hear, "I was bored. There isn't any activity at all, no communication with Mom." The office of International Students in AACPS has psychological help available.

Speaker 5, Bilingual Facilitator, Meade Middle School. This is the third year of our grant program funded by the AAC Partnership for Children, Youth, and Families. The project partnered with other schools in the past, however, this year it will be exclusively at Meade Middle School. The program has brought together African-American and Hispanic/Latino students at Meade Middle School. Six to eight students are engaged in developing decision making skills necessary in dealing with peer pressure, media influences, anger management, and gang recruitment. The program uses role models who have been through the immigrant and abandonment experiences. Last year was the first time the program was opened to non-Hispanics/Latinos. The program includes one day of soccer, and one day focusing on the life skills curriculum, e.g., how to analyze ads and propaganda. Students are exposed to former gang members through a series produced by the History Channel. We collaborate with EARTH-TREKS, a rock climbing center located in Columbia, MD, where students participate in team-building exercises. At EARTH-TREKS, students are tethered together and must work together. Activities at the climbing center are directed at the objective of *pursuing a common goal*. The program has also featured guest speakers. Last year a gentleman, with a background similar to that of many of our students, shared his experiences which include his journey from a homeless shelter to Princeton University, Oxford University, and Stanford University where he is now pursuing his doctorate.

Another important aspect of the program is sports. Most of our Latino/Hispanic students live and breathe soccer. Presently the program at Middle School is the only offering of this kind in the county. One of the barriers to expanding the program is limited grant funding.

Speaker 2, Coordinator of ESOL, explained that Block Grants for ESOL Title III target:

1) Buildings, 2) Family and community outreach and 3) Instructional programs. Programs in the 2nd and 3rd areas are all free. Transportation is provided. Last year, 70-75 % of our students were Latinos, about 3,000 in ESOL. Program is funded from the federal government in a Title 3 block grant for an international outreach program. It is also locally funded and from other gifts. We have a Summer Service Academy to strengthen English skills and improve middle schools. This program needs to be expanded. Expansion takes *marketing*, with appropriate links and personnel.

Speaker 6, Bilingual Facilitator, International Student Office. These programs need to make connection with someone who speaks students' native language. The most effective marketing is word-of-mouth among families. Information needs to start with the basics, with what seems like the *obvious* information. What draws and how to expand the program? Marketing. In the summer we are in Bates, Central and Annapolis middle schools. For parents, the question is, "What to do with the kids that's cheap?" Stanton has bi-lingual programs that explain rules, giving information. Word of mouth is the best marketing. One family knows another. Asked whether they target Hispanic housing clusters, they apparently leave that up to Tony Vasquez (former police liaison in Allen Apartments substation). "Tony Vasquez is a resource with a great skill set." Also, the outreach staff of ESOL has 11 Spanish speakers in the Outreach Office. Three or four of these staff members work through the summer.

Social Services

Speaker 7, Family Support Center at Building Blocks, 80 West St. We conduct after-school programs for students up to age 17. Help them with their homework. We bring in a family each month to work with. We see growth, kids on the Honor Roll. When a student does something important in school, she goes in and cheers.

She has a second group, *Building Blocks*, for Youth with Children, for 11-15 year olds. Glen Burnie has a *Building Block* program, too.

She serves as a connector with other programs, and during the school year she works 3 – 6 pm Monday - Thursday. After July 4th, her hours are 10 am – 3:30 pm. On Friday, she makes notes on progress. In the summer, there is a free summer school except for a \$4 charge for swimming. About 25-35 come to the camp. Volunteers and staff. Latino kids participate. She markets to school principals, also in a newsletter in Spanish. All information is in English and Spanish. Children come to West St. on a bus after school, or are dropped off by someone. In winter, she partners with Stanton Center. She has available a computer lab that kids can use.

Funding comes from private donors and foundations.

Touchstones.

Speaker 8, Director for Schools is with a volunteer group, *Touchstones*, which was started 25 years ago at St. John's College with seminars for 11 year-olds to college age. Materials for these seminars are drawn from the Great Books which are central to St. John's College curriculum. Participants are seated in a circle, and selections are read aloud, followed by discussion, led in a "Socratic" manner. Purpose of the seminars IS NOT THERAPY. It

focuses on dynamics, authority over the material, something you can do for yourself, and on building a community atmosphere. There are four stages. Key to effectiveness of the seminars is the dynamism of each group.

Each meeting has a reading, often from the early Greeks, about a page long. The leader reads aloud, for example, a section of the Odyssey. Students sit in a circle and discuss what is happening, how it is getting accomplished, its value. They are learning the art of working together and thinking together. The program is free, funded by grants. They try to do everything in English as much as possible. School does the recruiting.

Touchstones has a Baltimore program, and a program in Spanish which is run at the Annapolis Middle School and Boys & Girls Club. It is run at school sites, once a week or every other week. *Touchstones* now operates in public and private schools throughout the U.S. and internationally. Examples of area host settings: Jessup Prison, Baltimore City Public Schools for Hispanics/Latinos, Boys and Girls Club, Intergenerational groups. Training for leaders of seminars requires once a week sessions for one to two weeks. *Touchstones* does not charge for sessions. Marketing is not a major activity. Funding comes from grants and sale of materials published.

Annapolis Police

Speaker 9 receives referrals 1) for juvenile problems with the law and 2) by parental request. He will consult with school staff. We do not run after-school programs. We do have summer outings - charter a boat, fish all day, go rock climbing. There is a camp with about 25 campers.

He does a lot of mediation work with families. He runs into: "Can't control my kid." But parents are not at home when school is out, they are working. The kid has freedom. He's out and about. Hudson is now working with eleven kids; they don't have records. We recruit for camp through Latino housing clusters. Girls have fewer problems than boys. His work is with all Hispanic youth. Children are in a culture shock here. Parents don't understand; a lot of them have been childless for 8 or 10 years and now don't know what to do. Father puts the bread on the table in the old country. Mom runs the house and is also a bread winner. In a lot of cases, father is not working. He's drinking. So mom works two jobs. Other relatives are brought in to help out.

Gangs are not well organized here. But if the dad was once a gang member, then the son probably will be too, then the baby. MS-13 is not strong in Annapolis, but it is here. It is stronger in Glen Burnie High School and is strong in Virginia. We challenge newcomers. They don't like challenges. There is a lot of activity. He emphasized that the faster police challenge gang activity, the less gang activity there is. He noted that the 4 - 5 gangs in the Annapolis High School now stay mostly to themselves, and with other gangs. Before coming to Annapolis, he worked in Baltimore City. He considers after-school programs important, but they are not the only answer. Churches, families, TV, parents, schools, neighborhoods - all have got to get involved. They are what is there all the time for the children.

He emphasized that as communities we have lost our focus. He ranked past and present influences on children as follows:

<u>Used to be</u>	<u>Now is</u>
Church	Friends
Schools	TV
Parents	Parents
TV	Schools
Friends	Church

He insists neighborhoods must get involved! Know your neighbors.

Church

Speaker 10 affirmed the decrease in strength of the church as an influence in children's lives. She noted that AAC has only 9 pastors /churches serving primarily Spanish speaking congregations.

She circulated descriptions of the many programs in which she is involved, but due to time pressure was able to highlight only a few.

- A program for males 11-17 years old, funded from the Governor's Office, serves referrals from the Juvenile Justice system. Half of those served are from Bates Middle School.
- A program for girls getting into trouble runs Monday-Thursday, offers 14 weeks of family training, 2 weeks of physical activity, and focuses on critical aspects of culture and etiquette.
- *6-11 Friday Night Alternative* is a program to which this age group is regularly recruited. At each recruitment session, 10 to 12 Hispanic/Latino students apply and take home the mandatory HUD form which must be signed by parent(s). For whatever reasons, the parent(s)' lack of trust of those outside the home results in *NONE* of the Hispanic/Latino applicants showing up at the event. Also, there is tension between African Americans and Hispanics/Latinos.

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- Monday to Thursday there is a gym program with HIP.
- Project Alert is a 14-week program for strengthening the family.
- In summer, we have a 2-day Program Ascent with transportation and food provided, and with emphasis on culture and etiquette.
- We have a component at Bates Middle School with a HUD program, but only 10-12 Latino children applied for it.

Mental Health

Speaker 11, AAC Department of Mental Health, has a mentoring program through the YWCA for 140 students. Cultural blunders create *serious* problems with mental health services. Some of the cultural barriers for Hispanics/Latinos include: 1) Admitting an issue is *rare*; 2) Eye contact between a male client and female therapist can have negative connotations for the client.

The kids are in day care or pre-school. When the kids get kicked out of day care or other schooling, parents wail, "Who's going to take care of my kids?"

So, in Mental Health we have a real challenge. There is so much more out there for them than school. And at night, too. And TV. Insufficient sleep among this age group is common due to increasing options for evening activities such as TV. We have to listen to what kids really want. In our mentoring program at the YWCA, there is food, mentors, and activity. We do not render services 1-on-1, but rather at the YWCA all are in the group together. Focus is on acquiring social skills, which are *critical* to dealing with the issues which these youth are experiencing. Once a month, the group goes to a "sit down and be served" restaurant for socialization skills. Once a month there is a family night for trips; this gives the therapist the chance to observe parents with students. We try to bring parent interests together with mentors. We struggle with social and mental perplexity.

He has partnered with Georgetown University and can now call on a behavioral specialist.

The legal status of clients remains a *big* issue, since funding for this program is federal.

Community Outreach

Speaker 12, Hispanic Outreach & Grants Coordinator, Office of the County Executive, has had 18 years of experience here with Hispanics/Latinos. She sees pregnancies increasing among 11-14 year old girls. She stated that these girls face identity crisis; they were born here but feel rejected by peers and the dominant culture. They don't know who they are. Why they are here. Others say to them, "Why don't you go back to your country?" Sometimes their medical assistance has expired. They have to go to someone who knows how to fill out papers. But the papers have to be just right. A boy tried to kill himself here. He was discharged in Annapolis from the hospital, but he needed therapeutic help. We have systems for that in place, but they did not permit the boy to be seen by Mental Health people.

Latino people need information, correct information given. They are afraid of the government although they have food stamps and free school lunches available. They do not have access because they are uninformed, even if they have citizenship. Parents are not getting the information they need to help their children. We must have organizations where immigrants feel

LWVAA-ISC Report #3

safe, such as OHLA and Casa de Ayude, where families and their children can learn how to access our systems. This is *VITAL!* Community based organizations are really needed to help.

Speaker 13, Division of Career and Technology Education, did not get to speak, but brought materials to share.

AACPS runs a thriving program in technology, instructional business partnerships, "voc ed", and work-based learning--all of which is primarily for high school students with little impact on middle-years children. However, there are two exceptions: every 7th and 8th grade gets a tour of one or both of the Applied Technology Centers with annual parent meetings at feeder schools to promote interest; and there is a one-week summer program (Career Day Camp) for middle school students to help them explore future career possibilities. Transportation is provided from selected middle schools for this short day camp. There is a tuition fee.

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