

BLUEPRINT FOR SAFER PHILADELPHIA TESTIMONY
By Ana Echevarria

Congreso de Latinos Unidos received a grant for the Blueprint for a Safer Philadelphia Project to organize and sustain a youth violence reduction campaign targeting Latino youth in eastern north Philadelphia. Prior to receiving this grant, Congreso was a member of the Blueprint Planning Committee, where we were able to share and contribute our knowledge and expertise with stakeholders for creating programs that work to end and reduce youth violence in Philadelphia

Currently Congreso is implementing a public awareness campaign in north eastern Philadelphia, in the 24th and 25th police district where high incidents of violent crime take place. Through interactive workshops, trainings and with marketing materials that are consistent with the Blueprint message, we are spreading the word and socially marketing OR selling the idea of non-violence to young people and adults in our communities. Our primary effort has been and is educational workshops for young people, which consists of discussions about violence, what participants can do to prevent it, informing participants about community resources as well as providing strategies and skills for resolving conflicts peacefully.

Because of the size and structure of our organization AND our relationships with local organizations, Congreso has been able to integrate this project into our organizational efforts as well as across the eastern north area of the city. For example, I, the Blueprint project coordinator and facilitator, am currently conducting workshops at several elementary and middle schools such as Finletter, Julia DeBurgos and Sheridan Elementary schools. I also have presented workshops to youth from the Philadelphia Housing Authority who attend programs at the Lighthouse, to young people involved in

the Adolescent Violence Reduction Program managed by Congreso, in different community-based after school programs, at the E3 Center on Germantown Avenue, a program populated by youth from DHS or who are currently out of school. Congreso's Blueprint project is also involved with the anti-drug collaborative in north eastern Philadelphia called Abriendo Ojos and a new Latino Juvenile Justice network, which is advocating for juvenile justice in the Latino community. We believe this effort also promotes awareness about violence and its effect on our youth.

Congreso has been able to take the Blueprint project and integrate its work and agenda into our programs and into outside agencies and groups, within local public schools, in youth programs and after-school programs. We believe this approach is extremely efficient and effective in trying to address the health problem of youth violence in Philadelphia.

We hope the Blueprint project continues in eastern North Philadelphia. We know this is the first phase of a multi-year effort. Congreso is committed to reducing violence by and against youth. For many young people, the effects of violence are part of their every day life, and it is unfortunately that many children feel they need to use violence to defend themselves on the streets, in schools and in their homes. We know it is going to take more than public awareness to reduce and end violence as we know it. However awareness and public discourse is the first step to social change.

We hope we can continue this work of awareness and education for social change, of providing youth with alternatives to violence and of engaging parents in schools to help mentor children and reduce risk factors. Because we are seeking to change the culture of eastern north Philadelphia, Congreso have a long-term commitment to educating and

providing young people and adults with tools necessary to bring about change in their lives and in our communities.

We applaud the vision and efforts behind the Blueprint for a Safer Philadelphia and welcome the opportunity to continue our effort to reducing and eventually eliminating youth violence in north eastern Philadelphia.