

Mental Health Association of SE Pennsylvania
Community Advocacy Event
Dilworth Plaza of City Hall, Philadelphia – May 11, 2006

Good afternoon, my name is Kristin Shipler, and I serve as the Director of Civic Engagement with Congreso de Latinos Unidos, the largest Latino health, education, social services, and workforce development community-based not for profit agency in Pennsylvania. On behalf of the 24,000 clients we serve at Congreso, I am honored to be here today to share about our work in the mental health arena.

Congreso is happy to participate in Mental Health Month and to specifically speak on behalf of the clients and communities that we serve. We are committed, as is MHASP, to speak about the needs that exist, how we are addressing those needs, and how we can collaborate with folks around the city to provide services that meet our clients most effectively.

All of Congreso's programs, services and advocacy serve to confront and address the myriad of challenges facing our communities, and to secure a future for families and children. Mental Health is certainly one of them. The Philadelphia Health Management Corporation found that a sizeable portion of Latino adults in Philadelphia – 22.7% - have a diagnosed mental health condition. This is the highest rate among any ethnic/racial group in the city and is high in comparison to the overall rate in the city of 13.3%.

Congreso offers a wide array of Child Welfare services that are comprehensive, multicultural and are provided to the community residents to overcome language, cultural, educational and economic barriers. Our social work case management programs work with families and individuals to increase family stability and well being, increase protective factors and reduce risk factors for families and children, and increase community and educational support networks and linkages for families and children.

Congreso is currently collaborating with Mayor Street's Blue Ribbon Commission on Children's Behavioral Health's efforts to improve the quality and efficiency of the behavioral health system of care for Philadelphia's children and their families. We are collectively addressing the large health disparities in accessing services; expanding service options within the child welfare, education and juvenile justice systems; and promoting evidence-based intervention practices. All of these are issues that need to be addressed so that we can provide services that reflect the cultural richness of the City's children.

We believe that to address these complex family issues we must develop a more holistic approach to the process of change and mental health services for children within a family context. It is important to understand that this is a complex-multivariable issue that needs to consider the importance of education, at home and at school, parent's skills, therapy and, ultimately, social change. Integrating services with parents, children and

professionals, including mental health professionals, is the key to providing the care and attention our children and families need.

We have to be flexible enough to meet our client's needs and meet them where they are, encourage them to start planning how to change and provide them with the supportive system that can offer better possibilities to engage, improve and change. If we, as professionals, are involved in the services to a family, services must be orchestrated to make sure that the clients are given an opportunity to participate in their service and that ALL professionals involved must actively participate in the interventions and avail themselves to do so, no matter how busy we are.

To fully understand the mental health needs of our children, our families, and our community we must understand how the different systems play a role by either creating obstacles or promoting growth. We must understand how culture can help define the needs of the community as well as the interventions designed to address those needs. The availability of culturally and linguistically appropriate mental health services for Latinos in our community is limited.

The task of addressing the mental health needs of our children is not an easy one, but we do have the expertise and passion in our community, and we expect nothing but the best for our community. We hope that today's rally creates a renewed sense of commitment in resources, passion and intellectual capacity in supporting all city residents in need of mental health services. Thank you for listening, and thank you for taking an interest in hearing about our Latino community.