

BLUEPRINT FOR SAFER PHILADELPHIA TESTIMONY

By Kristin Shipler, Congreso de Latinos Unidos

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Good evening. My name is Kristin Shipler, and I am the Civic Engagement Director with Congreso de Latinos Unidos. Congreso received a grant for the Blueprint for a Safer Philadelphia Project to organize and sustain a linguistically and culturally competent 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 shared and contributed our knowledge and expertise with stakeholders for creating programs that work to end and reduce youth violence in Philadelphia.

Congreso's official partnership in the Blueprint ended when our grant was completed in July 2006. With this grant opportunity, we effectively implemented a public awareness campaign in north eastern Philadelphia, by delivering 50 one to two-hour workshops for over 700 youth (from 3rd grade to out-of-school youth). All of the workshops were delivered in the 24th and 25th police districts where high incidents of violent crime take place. Through interactive workshops, trainings and with marketing materials that are consistent with the Blueprint message, we spread the word and socially marketed or *sold* the idea of non-violence to young people and adults in our community. Our primary effort was educational workshops for young people, which consisted 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.

We based our approach on the American Psychological Association's (APA) keys to preventing youth who were exposed to violence from adopting violent behaviors themselves. These keys include ensuring that youth have access to: 1) positive role models; 2) a greater number of positive rather than negative behaviors; 3) supportive relationships; 4) avenues to develop self-esteem and self-efficacy; 5) a sense of hope about the future; 6) belief in themselves; 7) strong social skills; 8) good peer relationships; 9) trusting relationships with a nurturing adult outside of the family; 10) a sense of control over one's life and; 11) the ability to find refuge and a sense of self-esteem in hobbies and creative pursuits, useful work, and assigned chores. All of Congreso's children and youth programs operate using these key principles to guide the

development of anti-violence efforts and to support individual youth as they struggle to make difficult lifestyle and behavior changes that will lead them away from the violent norms of street culture present in Eastern North Philadelphia.

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, we conducted workshops at several elementary and middle schools; to youth from the Philadelphia Housing Authority who attend programs at the Lighthouse; to young people involved in the Adolescent Violence Reduction Program; in different community-based after-school programs; and at the E3 Center on Germantown Avenue, which is a program populated by youth from DHS or who are currently out of school. Congreso is continuing the work started by the Blueprint project through our efforts with the anti-drug collaborative in north eastern Philadelphia called *Abriendo Ojos* and the Latino Juvenile Justice Network, which is advocating for juvenile justice in the Latino community. This effort also promotes awareness about violence and its effect on our youth. We have a "Know Your Rights" workshop with the Policy Advisory Commission at Julia de Burgos Elementary School on November 18th. The work continues.

Congreso has now taken the Blueprint project and integrated 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 would like to see the Blueprint project continue 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. We are an active player in the Coalition to End Handgun Violence, with our first step coordinating a bus from our organization to the rally in Harrisburg on September 26th. We are also providers in the City's Adolescent Violence Reduction Project (AVRP) in the 25th police district and eastern north Philadelphia section of the city. AVRP works in conjunction with community-based alternative programs to provide intervention with youth, aged 10-15, who are at high risk of perpetrating or committing violence. In Congreso's neighborhood, for many young people, the effects of violence are part of their everyday lives, and it is unfortunate 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 has 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 partnership to reducing and eventually eliminating youth violence in eastern north Philadelphia.