

BUILDING COMPREHENSIVE SOLUTIONS TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Increasing Economic Opportunity for Battered Women National Resource Center on Domestic Violence

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BCS: 2005 in Review. 2005 was energizing and productive for BCS, including: (1) publishing *Economic Education Programs for Battered Women*; (2) reconvening the 15 BCS *Connecting Institute* State Teams in Baltimore to strategize and network on moving our comprehensive solutions advocacy forward; and (3) distributing BCS newsletters reporting on *Connecting Institute* work and profiling the Economic Justice Project of the Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence.

Stay tuned for new BCS written products in 2006. Our 19th policy and practice paper will soon be out! Written by Laurie Holmes, this paper describes how HarborCOV staff collaborated with people in the Chelsea, MA community to build an innovative organization and comprehensive solutions. Later this year, we plan to distribute a *Leaders' Guide to Building Comprehensive Solutions*. The *Guide* is designed to provide both long-term and emerging leaders with practical information about how to sustain and grow organizations dedicated to comprehensive solutions advocacy.

This BCS newsletter features *Casa de Esperanza of St. Paul, Minnesota*. Visionary. Effective. Multidimensional. These words begin to describe the essence of this vibrant organization working to mobilize communities to end violence against women and their families.

-- Jill Davies, BCS Project Director & Anne Menard, NRC DV Director

CASA DE ESPERANZA: MOBILIZING LATINAS AND LATINO COMMUNITIES TO END DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

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Over the last eight years **Casa de Esperanza** undertook a series of fundamental shifts to truly transform itself into a Latina organization. Casa de Esperanza focused its advocacy approach on women's strengths as well as issues identified by the community. **The vision is that Latinas, their families, and communities in Minnesota and throughout the world recognize and act to end domestic violence.** As Lupe R. Serrano, Executive Director, frames it, "The real power to end domestic violence is in the hands of the members of the community."

Continuously stopping and listening to women is the foundation of Casa de Esperanza's approach. For example, Casa de Esperanza conducted listening sessions in Minneapolis, a process that included learning

from 169 women about their hopes, dreams, and goals. Women were invited into dialogue with questions such as: How do you fill your days?; What are your hopes for your children?; What stops you from following your dreams?; and, Who do you go to for support? Women wanted the opportunity to follow their dreams, not handouts or to be "taken care of." Staff also learned that women felt isolated and did not know where to go for information. In response, Casa de Esperanza created an Information and Resource Center in Minneapolis at the *Mercado Central*, a Latino marketplace.

Connecting people within and between communities is key to Casa de Esperanza's theory of social change. Building social capital is Casa de Esperanza's philosophical

approach to ending domestic violence. This perspective is grounded in a belief that social networks have value, that people act in their own best interests, and that communities--not institutions--are where people live their lives.

Casa de Esperanza's advocacy seeks to empower families, change systems, and engage the community. This work includes:

- ⇒ *Fuerza Unida, A Manual for Engaging Communities;*
- ⇒ A collaboration with a community development initiative in the Twin Cities;
- ⇒ Two Information/Resource Centers--at *Mercado Central* and *Plaza Latina*;
- ⇒ *Talleres* (Latinas in the community are trained and provide workshops.);
- ⇒ Youth peer education on relationships and nonviolence, based on *¡Ubícate!*TM (Find Yourself), Casa de Esperanza's youth film;
- ⇒ Training and technical assistance to Latino-serving organizations through a grant from the Office on Violence Against Women; and
- ⇒ Family advocacy services to Latina victims of domestic violence.

LESSONS LEARNED:

1) An organization's senior leadership fosters comprehensive solutions by encouraging creative advocacy. Infusing

strengths-based, community-defined, empowering approaches into current advocacy transforms organizational practices and norms. At Casa de Esperanza, senior leadership fosters an open and innovative organizational culture, and intentionally promotes solutions-based responses and activities. As Amy Sánchez, Director of Fund Development and Communications, describes it, "At Casa de Esperanza you're told that you won't get fired for taking a risk or being creative...we absolutely want staff to take initiative to create solutions."

2) An organization that works effectively to end domestic violence is one that takes its lead from the community. Through decisive and courageous risk-taking, Casa de Esperanza moved from a shelter-based model to a community engagement approach. For example, after listening to community women, Casa de Esperanza engaged Latinas, community leaders, and other stakeholders in developing an action plan. The plan included a range of issues, such as family and community connections, childcare, and transportation. For Casa de Esperanza, the work starts and ends with Latino communities.

--Andrea C. Farney, NRCDV Policy Analyst

FOR MORE INFORMATION

www.casadeesperanza.org

Casa de Esperanza's web site contains a wide variety of materials that readers will want to access. Available information includes:

- Details of Casa de Esperanza's organizational development process;
- Tools for engaging communities;
- Descriptions of Casa de Esperanza's work activities and outcome measures; and
- Explanations of philosophy, mission, and values.