

Community Partner Advisory Group Meeting
MINUTES
Monday, March 7, 2005 Meeting—6:30 PM

Auditorium
County Courthouse Annex--Elkhorn, WI

James D’Alessandro, CPAG Chair, called the meeting to order at 6:32 p.m.

Roll call—CPAG members present included James D’Alessandro, Yvonne Fiskum, Dianne Kegley, Letha Kuecker, Hoss Rehberg, Nina Ruskey, Christopher Stebnitz, and Mary Vander Veen. A quorum was declared. Rollie Cooper and Marilyn Kienbaum arrived at approximately 6:38 p.m. Jacqueline Buleje arrived at approximately 6:39 p.m. Kathleen Tober arrived at approximately 6:46 p.m.

Ag and Extension Education Committee present—Committee members present included Dorothy Burwell, Don Fredrich, Stan Muzatko, and Sandra Wagie-Troemel. Greg Wescott arrived at approximately 6:35p.m.

UWEX staff present—Carolyn L. Belczyk, Department Head, Gabriela Anaya, WNEP Coordinator, Jan Ellsworth, 4-H Program Assistant, and Angie Recknagel, Recording Secretary.

Public in attendance—Sylvia Rodriguez, Latino-Hispanic Service Center, Lake Geneva, Terry Schuerman, Job Center, Elkhorn, Marcela Parodi, Human Resource Generalist, First Banking Center, Lake Geneva, and Isabel Kluge, Project Management Specialist, Public Housing Authority.

There were no withdrawals from the Agenda. **Stebnitz moved to approve the agenda as presented, with a second by Kegley. The motion carried 8-0.**

Ruskey moved to approve the minutes of the January 31 Community Partner Advisory Group meeting, with a second by Kuecker. The motion carried 8-0.

Public comment—There was no public comment.

Panel Discussion-Focusing on the Latino-Hispanic Community—Kluge with the Public Housing Authority spoke first. She gave a brief introduction of herself and what it is she does. The Housing Authority serves many Latinos. She’s been with the agency for thirteen years. Their agency provides rental assistance programs in Walworth County. Rodriguez with the Latino-Hispanic Service Center spoke second. She gave a brief introduction of what services their center provides. They have been in business for four years. The center provides information and referrals. Rodriguez is the only staff member, and on-site services and programs are very limited. They do have a connection with the Job Center. Rodriguez indicated that medical and dental assistance is a big need. There are no providers in Walworth County that accept medical assistance; all patients are referred to Racine, Rock, Kenosha or Milwaukee counties. Schuerman with the Job Center spoke next. She also gave a brief introduction of what services are provided through her agency. The Job Center provides a wide variety of services including

Spanish conversation classes, help in resume writing and job searches, etc. Parodi, Human Resource Generalist with the First Banking Center, spoke last. The bank has 17 branches, all in Wisconsin, with six of them being in Walworth County. They help the community help themselves by providing banking services. Tellers are learning some Spanish to work with the Latino community. Lack of documentation is a barrier to securing a loan from the bank.

D'Alessandro asked for more information about the documentation barrier. Kluge responded by saying most agencies receiving government funding are not able to provide assistance to families that are undocumented. Therefore, these families don't have the essentials needed to survive. Parodi also responded to the question, stating that it is frustrating because it is not a new issue, and some other states already have laws and regulations in place to help undocumented aliens. However, Wisconsin does not. This makes things even more frustrating. If families come to Wisconsin from another state, they do not understand why some services can't be provided here.

D'Alessandro asked if there is a process for identifying those who are undocumented and for helping them obtain documentation. Kluge responded that for most families it is very unaffordable. It is nearly impossible to get through to the Immigration offices in Milwaukee. Rodriguez stated that families seeking documentation probably have to go to a private attorney and that most people can't afford one. Schuerman stated the process for documentation is a long one. Kluge stated she has been working with a family that has been trying for eight years now to become documented and are still in the process. Schuerman stated it is nearly impossible for these people to become documented. It is not that they do not want to be legal; it is that they cannot do it fast enough or for a reasonable cost.

D'Alessandro noted that they are here, therefore there must be employers hiring them. They are apparently making a living. So how can we address their needs when they have no documentation? Rodriguez stated that the employers help them. Latino immigrants are willing to pay no matter what the charge is. They do not want or expect anything for free. The problem is they cannot get the services they need because the first question asked is about documentation, and they are not able to provide it. Some have gotten an IT number from the government and have paid their taxes, but they are not able to claim refunds or services because they never received credits for the income tax. Schuerman reported that employment and the IT number helps with the documentation process because this proves that they have been working and are able to provide for themselves and not be dependent on society. Rodriguez said some banks will accept the IT number for savings and checking accounts and also mortgages, but some banks will not. Schuerman stated that she believes documentation is the biggest issue.

Anaya noted that because documentation is such a big barrier, Latino immigrants often don't even realize that there are many services offered that do not require documentation. Extension's WNEP program is one such service. Schuerman and Rodriguez both indicated that their agencies do not require documentation. Kluge stated that some housing programs require documentation and so do most health and human services. These are among the services Latinos need the most--housing and medical assistance.

Keinbaum noted that many of these families have a lot of people all living under one roof. Rodriguez stated that this is their culture, and families try to help each other. Kluge commented maybe this is a number one place to start—through cultural understanding—to learn more about Latino culture.

Burwell noted there is a Catch-22. Landlords do not want to rent to these families because they will have three or four families living together. However, if they're not rented to, then these two or three families may have no place affordable place to live. Rodriguez said that is correct. Families have to fill out an application and have referrals, but not all are able to do this, so they stay together until they can. Then they will go out on their own.

Kuecker expressed concern regarding the need for families receiving medical assistance to go to Racine or Kenosha for health care. Why are these services not available in Walworth County? Rodriguez stated it is not just a problem in Walworth County. It is a government issue. Because the government does not make payments to providers in a timely manner, the doctors and dentists will not accept patients on medical assistance.

Cooper asked if documentation is available in their home country before they come here? Kluge responded that immigrants can apply for a visa prior to coming here. Bulege stated that often immigrants have applied for a visa before leaving their home country. However, it is such a long process that they are already living here and waiting for a call to go back and get their documentation.

Belczyk asked why they come to the United States and to Wisconsin. Kluge gave an example of a client who had five children, and her husband was in jail. She was pregnant with her sixth child. She came to the Housing Authority for assistance. Housing asked if they could help her in get back to Mexico, because there were no services available since no one in her family had documentation. She responded absolutely not. Life there is much worse than living here, and she and her family would much rather live day-by-day here than return to Mexico.

D'Alessandro asked if part of the reason the Latinos come is because of the demand for their services from area employers. Kluge stated this is a correct. For example, Birds Eye Food in Darien caters to the Latino migrant workers because they need them.

Transportation is another big issue for the Latinos. Stebnitz asked about the legal exposure that the employer puts him/herself into by hiring an undocumented alien. Schuerman stated the employer is given a list of items to check and must sign the I-9 form. Parodi stated the employer is not the one responsible for ensuring that the documents presented are legal. The employer risks a penalty, but the employee is the one who must prove the documents are legal or risk deportation.

Belczyk asked about the issue of literacy. Kluge responded that it is a huge issue. Many immigrants have little formal education, only through second or third grade. Schuerman stated that if English as Second Language (ESL) classes could be offered at the work site and based on what's needed for the job, it would be a great help. Fiskum stated that such classes have been offered through Gateway. They were not as successful as they had hoped. Parodi stated that Birds Eye also tried this, and they also did not have the success they had hoped.

Belczyk asked about discrimination as an issue. Rodriguez stated it is a problem in the workplace. The Latinos complain that they get the jobs nobody else wants.

Cooper asked about what UW-Extension can do for the Latino population. Rodriguez responded that Extension could help get a low-income clinic for medical and dental services through collaborations and grants. Kluge would like to see more grants for ESL classes in the workplace and for transportation. She understands this is not the type of services Extension provides, but maybe there is some way we could help. Schuerman noted that something Extension could work on is obtaining a grant for a bilingual CNA class, which has been done previously by the Job Center. Wescott noted that Extension can help build collaborations to increase the community's response to issues such as English as a Second Language and literacy.

Where do we go from here?—Belczyk asked the CPAG members where they want to go from here. Do we want to have additional panel discussions on other Extension program areas, such as agriculture; families, youth, and children; or community development? Or, do we want to complete our study of the issues facing Latinos and ways in which UW-Extension may be able to respond? Consensus was reached that our next meeting will include a discussion of UW-Extension mission and mandates and a review of what's currently being done with Latino outreach programming by extension locally, around the state, and across the nation. Anaya is traveling to Oregon next week as part of a study team to observe ways in which Oregon's extension service is providing outreach to the Latino population. We will ask her to report on the team's findings at our next meeting.

Next Meeting Date— The group will meet on April 11, 2005, and May 9, 2005 at 6:30 p.m.

Adjournment—**Cooper moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:00 p.m., and Stebnitz seconded the motion. The motion carried 12-0.**

Submitted by Angie Recknagel, recording secretary. Minutes approved by the Advisory Group on April 18, 2005.

