



# Engaging Latino Immigrant Men in Preventing Domestic Violence

Supporting a community-based initiative to reduce domestic violence among Latinos in central New Mexico

## SUMMARY

*Enlace Comunitario*<sup>1</sup> is a social justice organization led by Latina immigrants in central New Mexico. Staff at Enlace sought to engage Latino immigrant men in the prevention of domestic violence by approaching the men as allies rather than adversaries in this effort.

Between September 2011 and August 2014, with funding through *Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Local Funding Partnerships*, Enlace staff offered domestic violence prevention classes for Latino immigrant men. They also trained a small group of men to become “promotores”—community leaders who would make presentations on this topic to other immigrant men.<sup>2</sup>

## Key Results

- During its first two years, Enlace staff conducted several courses with Latino immigrant men (some of the courses included women). Courses just for men included:
  - *Entre Amigos*, a course that improved participants’ knowledge and attitudes about domestic violence and understanding of its causes and imparted new anti-violence skills.
  - *Padres Responsables*, which promoted violence-free fatherhood skills.
- Enlace staff conducted a 12-week promotores training program for adult males to become anti-violence leaders who would mobilize Latino men to prevent domestic violence against women and girls; it culminated in early May 2014 with the induction

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<sup>1</sup> The mission of Enlace Comunitario is to eliminate domestic violence in the Latino immigrant community and to promote healthy families through comprehensive intervention services provided in Spanish, preventative community education, policy advocacy, and leadership development.

<sup>2</sup> Earlier, Enlace Comunitario had received a grant in RWJF’s *Strengthening What Works* program (ID# 66954, \$175,000, November 1, 2009 to October 31, 2012) to evaluate another domestic violence prevention project.

of eight promotores, each of whom will conduct a minimum of three presentations over the next year.

- Participants in Enlace’s programs for immigrant men worked with Enlace staff to produce a bilingual video that challenges social norms perpetuating violence against women, as well as a two-month anti-violence media campaign.

## Funding

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) supported this project from September 2011 through August 2014 with a \$200,000 grant<sup>3</sup> to Enlace Comunitario through the Peaceful Pathways initiative of the *RWJF Local Funding Partnerships* program which ran from 1987 to 2015. See the [Special Report](#) for more information on the program. It was a matching grant program that supported innovative, community-based projects aimed at improving health and health care for underserved and vulnerable populations.<sup>4</sup> Peaceful Pathways was a special solicitation for projects to reduce violence in diverse, traditionally underserved communities.

Local funding partners providing matching funds included the [New Mexico Community Foundation](#) (\$54,500 through its Women Building Community Fund) and [Encuentro](#), an immigrant center in Albuquerque (\$92,870 through the W.K. Kellogg Foundation). Enlace Comunitario, working with two other local agencies, collaborated to create Encuentro and remains a close, ongoing relationship with it.

## CONTEXT

Domestic violence is widespread in New Mexico; one in three New Mexican women will experience domestic violence in her lifetime, according to an analysis of 2008 data from the New Mexico Interpersonal Violence Data Central Repository.<sup>5</sup> While domestic violence occurs in all racial, ethnic, and income groups, Latinas are at greater risk of experiencing domestic violence than non-Latina Whites and less likely to access services due to linguistic and cultural barriers. In 2008, 44 percent of the New Mexico population was Latino, yet 50 percent of domestic violence victims identified by law enforcement were Latina/Latino.

Since men are the large majority of perpetrators of domestic violence, male involvement is critical to development of effective campaigns to prevent domestic violence, change male attitudes and behavior, and reduce the incidence of such violence. Yet, despite the

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<sup>3</sup> Grant ID# LFP 69210 (\$200,000; September 1, 2011 to August 31, 2014)

<sup>4</sup> *RWJF Local Funding Partnerships* ran from 1987 to 2014.

<sup>5</sup> Caponera B. *Incidence and Nature of Domestic Violence in New Mexico IX: An Analysis of 2008 From The New Mexico Interpersonal Violence Data Central Repository*. Office of Injury Prevention New Mexico Department of Health and New Mexico Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs, 2009. Available [online](#).

need, there were no programs to engage Latino immigrant men in preventing domestic violence in New Mexico prior to 2011.

## **RWJF's Interest in This Area**

RWJF has supported a range of programs directed to the prevention of intimate partner violence in a variety of populations. Examples include:

- The *DELTA PREP* project, which worked with 19 state-level domestic violence coalitions (2007 to 2012). For more information, read the [Program Results Report](#).
- *Close to Home Domestic Violence Prevention Initiative* (2008 to 2011), which used a community-mobilization approach to prevent domestic violence. For more information, read the [Program Results Report](#).
- *Start Strong: Building Healthy Teen Relationships* (2008 to 2012), a national effort to develop and implement effective strategies to prevent relationship violence among youth. For more information, read the [Evaluation Summary](#).
- *Safe Dates* (2009 to 2011), a dating abuse prevention program implemented in eight middle and high schools in New Jersey. For more information, read the [Program Results Report](#).
- *Refugees in Metropolitan Atlanta Get Help with Family Violence* (2007 to 2010), a project to assist refugees in metropolitan Atlanta in getting help with family violence. For more information, read the [Program Results Report](#).
- *Strengthening What Works: Preventing Intimate Partner Violence in Immigrant and Refugee Communities* (2009 to 2013), a national program that supported eight organizations to evaluate the intimate partner violence prevention programs they offered in immigrant and refugee communities. For more information, read the [Program Results Report](#). Three of the organizations participating in *Strengthening What Works* served Latino immigrant communities, including Enlace Comunitario.

## **THE PROJECT**

Enlace Comunitario, one of the eight grantees of *Strengthening What Works*, is a social justice organization led by Latina immigrants in central New Mexico. Staff at Enlace sought to engage Latino immigrant men in the prevention of domestic violence by approaching the men as allies rather than adversaries in this effort.

Support for the inclusion of men in the organization's domestic violence prevention programs was strong among Enlace clients and among the promotoras who worked with Latina women, according to Project Director Sandra D. Ortsman, MCRP, MA.<sup>6</sup> This

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<sup>6</sup> Ortsman is director of Development, Planning and Evaluation, Enlace Comunitario, and was co-project director of Enlace's *Strengthening What Works* project.

support for working with men surfaced during Enlace’s *Strengthening What Works* evaluation, when outgoing promotoras, in exit interviews, indicated that the agency should work with men, and participants at presentations indicated the same thing in their feedback surveys. Enlace takes listening to its stakeholders very seriously and that feedback was integral in developing the men’s project.

*“One of the problems with batterer intervention programs is that men go into this program for two hours a week and the rest of the time they’re out in a world that promotes violence against women. We felt that if we were going to eventually have a batterer intervention program we needed to do some work so that when men left the group they had other images of men that didn’t promote violence against women.”—Sandra Ortsman, MCRP, MA*

Nonviolent men may be silent bystanders to violence against women since they may believe that other men find such violence acceptable, notes researcher Alan D. Berkowitz, PhD, in an overview of strategies for involving men in violence prevention efforts.<sup>7</sup> And violent men may interpret this silence as approval.

Many immigrant men are actually uncomfortable witnessing violence against women, therefore, according to Enlace staff, a strategy focused on changing social norms may be effective in changing men’s perceptions of other men and in creating disincentives to be silent bystanders.

## **Project Design**

The project was designed to include:

- Creation of a cadre of adult Spanish-speaking Latino promotores, male anti-violence leaders who would mobilize Latino men to prevent domestic violence against women and girls. Promotores were expected to commit to 12 months of promotores service that would include:
  - Ongoing leadership training by Enlace staff (an initial intensive program followed by monthly sessions on topics identified by the promotores)
  - Presentations and participation at community meetings throughout central New Mexico to speak out against domestic violence.

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<sup>7</sup> Berkowitz AD. “Working with Men to Prevent Violence Against Women: An Overview (Part One).” Applied Research Forum, October 2004. Available [online](#).

Enlace staff hoped to train a new group of promotores each year.

- The development and offering of classes for immigrant Latino men focusing on forming healthy relationships and responsible fathering and parenting skills
- Assistance by the promotores in developing social norms outreach and public education campaigns involving, for example, messages that reframe the Latino *machismo* concept from a negative image of men as controlling and even abusive, to a positive image of men as responsible, supportive, and nonviolent

## Project Implementation in the Real World

Since Enlace Comunitario had worked for many years with women, said Ortsman, “We’ve always had groups of women to select from. So many women want to be part of the promotoras project that we get to choose those who are most ready.”

But recruiting men to participate was a considerable challenge. Enlace did not have relationships with men and like many domestic violence services providers, was even seen by some in the community as an organization that was against men. “The anti-man reputation is common amongst many organizations serving DV survivors. We had to really work on changing our image in the community,” Ortsman explained. “We did some media campaigns to do that.”

Enlace staff had to reorient project expectations regarding its objective to prepare men to serve as promotores. “We realized in the first year that that was not going to happen,” said Ortsman. The men would not commit to a year of serving as promotores. But, Ortsman said, they would commit to taking a course.

Project staff, therefore, focused on the development and launching, over time, of courses that addressed domestic violence prevention, healthy relationships, and violence-free parenting. This process initially surprised Ortsman, but she acknowledged that “that was what had to happen because we don’t have a track record of serving men.”

Over time some men who participated in the courses began to say “I want to do more. I want to be engaged. I want to be a promotor.” Finally a class came together for a 12-week men’s promotores training program that finished in early May 2014.

## RESULTS THROUGH MAY 2014

The grant project staff reported results in reports to RWJF and in an interview with the project director for this report.

- **During the project’s first two years, Enlace staff conducted four different Spanish language courses with the male participants (two courses included women).** Since having men present during regular hours at Enlace posed a possible

safety risk—or the perception of one—among Enlace’s female clients, courses were held after hours at Enlace and at Encuentro and local churches:

- *Entre Amigos* (Among Friends) is a five-session course for men that uses the curriculum from *Hombres Unidos Contra la Violencia* (Men United Against Family Violence), a program of the Migrant Clinicians Network, another *Strengthening What Works* grantee. Some 149 men completed this class.

Scores on pre- and post-course tests demonstrated improved understanding of the root causes of domestic violence and the acquisition of skills to take charge in anti-violence work. Scores from classes given in the first six months of the project are representative:

- Before the course 50 percent of participants believed that domestic violence victims are at fault for provoking the violence. After taking the course, only 8 percent of participants still believed that.
  - At the end of the course, all participants stated that they believed they could help prevent rape and partner abuse in their community and that they understood that women and men should have equality in relationships.
- *Relaciones Saludables* (Healthy Relating) uses a curriculum developed by Enlace staff for Latino men and women that draws on their experiences and covers topics including self-esteem, communications, conflict resolution, and sexuality. Some 88 people completed this course.

Scores on knowledge of these topics increased significantly by the end of the course. For example, based on pre- and post-test scores, the average for one class increased from 39 percent before the course to 69 percent at course completion, another from 38 percent to 71 percent, and yet another from 42 percent to 77 percent. Comments from the men included:

- “The course helped me improve communication with my children.”
  - “It helped me be more assertive and less overprotective of my children.”
- *Padres En Accion* (Parents in Action) introduced fathers and mothers to innovative and effective techniques for parenting in current times, specifically addressing challenges faced by immigrant parents in this country. Some 56 people completed the class. Pre- and post-test scores ranged from as low as 30 percent knowledge of effective parenting techniques at the start of the course to a high of 90 percent after completion.
  - *Padres Responsables* (Responsible Fatherhood) classes promote violence-free fatherhood skills. Topics include men’s health, friendship with other men, self-awareness, sexuality, parenting, and co-parenting. Some 15 men completed this class, which began in late 2013.



- **Enlace staff conducted a 12-week male promotores training program, which culminated in early May 2014 with an induction ceremony for eight new promotores.** At the ceremony the men shared what being a promotor meant to them.

*“I was really moved by the things they were saying,” said Ortsman. “They were talking about how this doesn’t stop here, it starts here. One thing is talk, another thing is action.”*

Ortsman is relieved and happy with the outcome. “It’s taken us two years, but we’ve got a class of promotores and they’re all trained and they’re ready to go out and do presentations.”

The promotores will present to other Latino immigrant men in the community as part of the next Entre Amigos course over the next year. Men who complete Entre Amigos are eligible to begin the next promotores training program.

## Communications Results

Participants worked with Enlace staff on several communications products:

- *50 Messages 50 Faces* is a bilingual video starring participants of the Entre Amigos course produced as part of their ongoing campaign to challenge social norms that perpetuate violence against women. It can be viewed on the Enlace [website](#).
- “*Cada hombre puede ser fuerte sin ser violento*” (“Men can be strong without being violent”) was a two-month media campaign launched in July 2013 that included public service announcements on Spanish language radio stations, billboards, and posters distributed to local businesses and organizations serving Spanish-speaking customers and clients. A [page](#) on the Enlace website includes links to a press release about the campaign as well as to two public service announcements.

See the [Bibliography](#) for details.

## LESSONS LEARNED

1. **Use a variety of tactics to recruit Latino immigrant men to domestic violence prevention classes and trainings.** Enlace staff hired a graduate of its Entre Amigos class to become a second community educator, helping to coordinate the project. Having two coordinators allowed for a wider reach in the Latino community. In addition, this individual has many contacts within local churches in central New Mexico and has reached out to pastors and priests who have agreed to offer the Entre Amigos course to their parishioners. (Project Director Ortsman)
2. **Develop an interest among Latino immigrant men in significant engagement in domestic violence prevention activities by drawing them in over time.** While the men would not initially agree to a 12-month commitment as a promotores, they were

willing to attend classes. Then, some were willing to become involved in other activities of limited duration, such as the video project. In time, a group of men emerged that wanted to become promotores, committing to 12 weeks of training and 12 months of community presentations. (Project Director Ortsman)

## THE WORK CONTINUES

As of May 2014, Ortsman expects to continue the project after the grant ends if funding can be found. Enlace staff has applied for a federal grant through the Office on Violence Against Women at the U.S. Department of Justice and is pursuing other funding avenues as they are identified.

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