

## Padres Unidos: Partnering with Parents for Prevention – Sonoma County's Story

by Kimberly Clouse and Belinda Basca



### CASE STUDY

The *SDFSC Case Study Series* is intended to provide a snapshot of the programs implemented and lessons learned by SDFSC grantees as a service to other grantees and alcohol and drug prevention providers.

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### INTRODUCTION

Many immigrant parents face the challenge of assimilating into the United States without the benefit of knowing the English language and American culture. These parents may struggle to maintain close relationships with their children who often learn English faster than their parents, become immersed in popular culture at school, and begin to break cultural traditions of close family connections by developing friends and personal lives that don’t include their parents. “It’s very difficult to live with one foot in one culture and one in another,” said one immigrant parent, “so we have to teach them to navigate through both.”

A recent study by Asmussen et al<sup>1</sup> (2007) provides evidence for the widespread belief that involving parents in intervention programs is beneficial to their children and increases the effectiveness of preventing at-risk behaviors. A few key findings in the study include:

- While peers are more influential during adolescence than during any other point in a child’s development, they are still not nearly as influential as parents. In fact, parenting practices moderate the effects peers have on their teenage children.
- The extent to which teenagers avoid the risks commonly associated with adolescence is largely influenced by educational and socio-cultural factors determined and moderated by their parents.
- High quality educational and home-life experiences are key determinates of positive adolescent outcomes.

The Sonoma County *Padres Unidos (Parents United)* program is an effort to provide education and support to recently immigrated monolingual Latino parents of high-risk youth. Parents and youth are brought together with support services and resources to ensure parents are empowered to guide their children on a safe journey into adulthood. Their program is the subject of this case study.

<sup>1</sup> Asmussen, K., Corlyon, J., Hauari, H., and La Placa, V. (2007). Supporting Parents of Teenagers. Policy Research Bureau, Department for Education and Skills, Report RR830. <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/RR830.pdf>

## PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

*Padres Unidos*, implemented by Community Action Partnership of Sonoma County (CAP), was designed to strengthen the relationship between monolingual Latino parents and their middle school, high-risk children, and between unassimilated Latino parents and their children's school administrators and teachers.

*Padres Unidos* came about as an expansion of the Gang Risk Intervention Program. The project was supported by an existing coalition with Sonoma County Community Health Partnership, Sonoma County Office of Education, Department of Health Services, Santa Rosa Police Department, several community-based organizations, parents, teachers, business owners, representatives from the faith community, and neighborhood organizations.

*Padres Unidos* chose to implement the *Parent Project*® curriculum as a core educational component of the program. The *Parent Project*® has been adopted for use by state departments of education, school districts, courts, local law enforcement agencies, probation departments, mental health care professionals, the United States military and communities in 30 states. It is currently the largest court mandated or juvenile diversion program in many areas, including the *Parent Project's*® home region of Los Angeles and San Bernardino Counties and the entire state of Idaho. (County probation departments in Idaho report a one-third drop in juvenile crime and one year recidivism rates as low as 4% after mandating *Parent Project*® classes.) To date, more than 80,000 parents have completed *Parent Project*®.

Sonoma County's *Padres Unidos* program is unique in that it utilizes the *Parent Project*® curriculum in combination with a wrap-around service model to engage parents and youth in a comprehensive, family strengthening experience. An important component enhances early screening and referral of middle school youth to gang intervention, mental health, and/or substance abuse treatment services. The curriculum is the only parenting skills program of its kind in the United States focusing on destructive adolescent behaviors. Parents learn concrete strategies to address problems such as poor school attendance and performance, alcohol and drug use, gang involvement, truancy, family conflict, running away and violence. There has been a demographic shift over

### The *Parent Project*® successes include:

- Honored with three state awards in California;
- Adopted for use by hundreds of schools and community-based organizations throughout the nation;
- Identified by former Governor Pete Wilson as one of three exemplary prevention programs in California; and
- Recognition as a model evidence-based program with the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (in process).

the past several years in Santa Rosa that contributes to the need for this program. An increasing number of incoming students are children of Spanish-speaking immigrants, mostly from Mexico. At the outset, *Padres Unidos* focused on two of the five middle schools in the Santa Rosa City School District having the highest population of English-learning students; 54% at Cook Middle School, and 36% at Comstock Middle School. About 33% of students at Cook Middle School qualify for free or reduced lunches and 50% are of Hispanic ethnicity. Over 25% of students at Comstock Middle School qualify for free or reduced lunches and 31% are of Hispanic ethnicity.

*"Santa Rosa schools have grown increasingly segregated in the past decade, dividing white and Latino majorities onto separate campuses. The trend...reflects a rapid influx of Latino students and the accelerated flight of middle-class white students from schools with the lowest test scores and the largest numbers of low-income students."*

—Press Democrat, May 2, 2004

The primary goal of the *Padres Unidos* program is to meet the special needs of recently immigrated Latino families struggling with the challenges of parenting teens identified as high-risk for involvement in violence and substance abuse. The *Padres Unidos* program has four main components:

### ***Screening, Referral, and Recruitment***

The screening, referral, and recruitment component involves an intensive process that includes direct personal outreach and sophisticated marketing strategies. Once parents are referred or recruited, a Family Advocate contacts the family, provides support, and encourages their participation in the program. An intake process builds relationships with participants and establishes a sense of each family's issues before class meetings begin.

The Family Advocate offers a range of one-on-one support including: a six-step implementation plan, facilitating ongoing support from alumni, referrals to wrap-around services and follow-up, as well as three to six months of follow-up support.



### **Parent Training**

The parent training component involves a sixteen-week parenting skills course in which Spanish-speaking bilingual facilitators engage parents in supporting each other through a peer support group. Booster, or educational sessions, are provided for further enrichment of a particular topic where the need for further support is identified by parents and facilitators. Booster sessions are open for attendance by both current parents of the program as well as alumni. Group and booster skill session topics include:

- How parents communicate needs to their children without arguing;
- How parents deal with negative friendships and relationships;
- How parents positively get involved in their teen's life; and
- How parents maintain a good relationship with a past partner(s) for the good of their children.

### **Youth Services**

The youth services component focuses on helping youth develop relationships with responsible adults, establish individual goals and design community and school activities for project participants. A Family Advocate completes youth assessments, initiates goal setting, and monitors sessions for the at-risk children of parents enrolled in the parenting program. The one-on-one sessions involve measuring youth perceptions of parents, youth self-assessment, and short-term goal setting related to youth-identified needs. Group sessions focus on school success, and opportunities for youth activities, such as field trips and picnics. The Family Advocate also schedules parent/child sessions as needed in which the advocate works with the parent and child together on specific issues to provide support in positive family communication and parent involvement in schooling, setting boundaries, and establishing high expectations.

### **Alumni Support**

The alumni support component provides a variety of services and support to program graduates and their children. The alumni program primarily continues to support parents' six-step plans. Groups are convened quarterly for booster sessions, and a quarterly newsletter is sent to all alumni to encourage





continued participation. Not only are alumni able to continue receiving support for new parenting issues that may arise within their family, they are also able to provide support to new program participants.

The first round of *Padres Unidos* was originally slated to service up to 40 at-risk Latino youth and 50 parents per year through the two selected schools. However the scope of the program has expanded over time to serve students and families at schools city-wide. The actual number of participants included 158 students and 273 parents, including 67 single parent households.

Program participation during 2007 included the following highlights:

- There were a total of 93 parents enrolled in *Padres Unidos* parent training program, with 57 parents completing 8 or more sessions.
- This population was 100% Hispanic and largely monolingual, although some bilingual parents participated.

- Parents ranged in age from 26 years to 45 years.
- The classes were represented by 56% females and 44% males.
- Fourteen parent graduates returned to participate in alumni support activities.
- 74 youth participated in case management and/or childcare/youth development activities.

Evaluation data collected over the past three years shows that *Padres Unidos* participants increased in:

- Parental ability to address signs of AOD use and gang involvement;
- Parental confidence in disciplining their children;
- Parental involvement in education;
- Family cohesion; and
- Positive family communication.

## THE STORY OF MARGARITA

Sometimes it takes an escalation of a child's destructive behavior before parents become involved. Margarita was one such child. Her mother, Consuelo called *Padres Unidos* because her daughter was getting out of control toward the end of 8th grade. The school had referred Margarita's family to the program due to her poor grades, gang involvement, and her aggressive and defiant behaviors. Over the summer Margarita became even more difficult at home, ignoring curfews, often staying out all night, and coming home on numerous occasions under the influence of alcohol. At one point she even ran away.

At the beginning of the following school year, when the Family Advocate called to remind Consuelo and Pedro about the first meeting, she heard yelling in the background. During the call Margarita began pushing and threatening her mother. The Advocate was barely able to advise Consuelo to call the police before the phone suddenly went dead. Another Family Advocate drove to the house to find Consuelo with marks on her neck. Although Margarita's behavior had worsened over the summer and fall, it wasn't until February that Consuelo and her husband, Pedro, attended their first session.

Through the program Consuelo and Pedro, along with the other parents, learned to lay the foundation for change. They learned to:

- Express love and affection everyday
- Practice active supervision to better monitor their child
- Handle their child's defiance, and alcohol and drug use more effectively
- Set and enforce limits
- Work with schools to improve attendance and grades

Consuelo and Pedro finally had a road map. The parents took actions to regain control. They made a list of the things that were important to Margarita, such as her cell phone. If she broke the family rules, they would take away one of these things for a limited amount of time. They asked that Margarita be involved in youth activities available through the agency. Consuelo took Margarita to and from school, friend's houses, and other activities. Things started to change.

When the Family Advocate met with Margarita, she shared that her parents had taken away some of her things. The Family Advocate involved Margarita in what needed to be done and advised her in the behavior that needed to be corrected. Eventually, with her parents' continuous involvement and vigilance, Margarita went from cutting classes every week to attending every day. Consuelo ensured this change by checking with the school to confirm Margarita's attendance, first calling on a daily basis and then monitoring her daughter periodically. The parents reported that arguments had decreased, which they credited to having more tools to deal with Margarita's difficult behavior.

Since the session completion, things continue to improve for Margarita's family. Even though conflicts still arise, Margarita's parents are better equipped to resolve issues more quickly and cooperatively. Consuelo and Pedro's new skills include monitoring Margarita's whereabouts effectively; she no longer leaves the house without asking permission. Margarita has been involved in a youth group and community volunteer work. She has not shown signs of alcohol or drug use. Staff recently met with Margarita and discussed goals for the new school year and developed an action plan to reach those goals. Margarita appears to be more connected to her family and school, and is motivated to do well.

## BEST PRACTICES AND STRATEGIES

There are several key strategies that *Padres Unidos* utilizes as they meet the special needs of recently immigrated Latino families struggling with the challenges of parenting teens identified as high-risk for involvement in violence and substance abuse.

### #1 Provide Support to Reduce Barriers to Participation and Encourage Retention

*Padres Unidos* offers childcare for younger siblings, and youth development activities allow youth and parents to attend classes at the same time in the same facility. Staff provides hearty refreshments for parents and children at all classes. Class locations are close to neighborhoods in which participating parents live and at centrally located *Padres Unidos* offices. Advocates promote ride sharing among parents and rides are provided as needed.

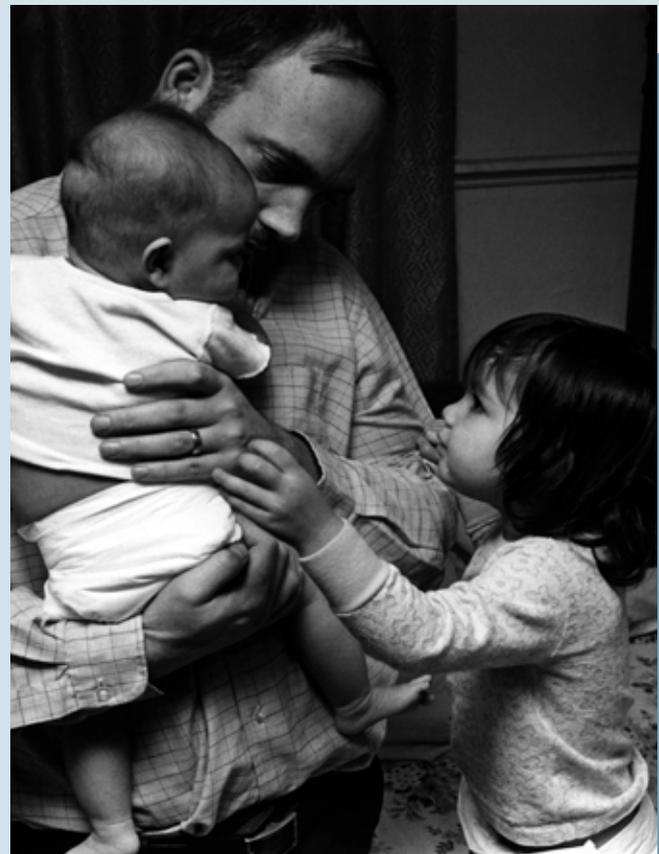
The *Padres Unidos* program is proud of their efforts to not only get parents to the program, but to keep them coming back. Eliminating barriers to participation and creating the Alumni component ensures that parents will continue to apply the skills learned in the program as well as help others get involved. To date, the program has been very successful in recruiting and retaining parent participation through booster sessions, a “Parent University,” and other alumni activities.

In order to be responsive to the needs of the community, the staff made slight program adjustments along the way, based on the feedback received from parents. For example, staff added “Booster Sessions” or mini workshops for parents after the 16-week sessions concluded on specific topics, such as gang involvement.

While parents are in session, youth are provided tutoring and help with homework. Project staff were able to secure volunteers to help with tutoring by building a partnership with a local bank that allowed employees time to volunteer with the project.

### #2 Enhance Curriculum for Participants

While *Padres Unidos* delivers the Spanish version of the *Parent Project*® as intended by the original developers, CAP has incorporated enhancements that make it more appropriate for the monolingual Spanish-speaking community. Enhancements to the Spanish curriculum include:



- An intensive referral and recruitment process that includes direct personal outreach and sophisticated marketing strategies.
- An intake process that helps facilitators build relationships with participants and establish a sense of each family's issues before class meetings begin.
- A Family Advocate who offers a range of one-on-one support including a six-step implementation plan, facilitating ongoing support from alumni, referrals to wrap-around services and follow-up, as well as three to six month follow-up support.
- Youth support that includes family advocate meetings with youth for one-on-one goal setting; group sessions that focus on school success; and links to youth-related wrap-around services such as field trips and picnics.
- Resources to reduce barriers to participation and support retention that include nutritious food at sessions, childcare, and rewards for participation.
- An overall family approach, where children participate in childcare, teens work in study sessions, and parents attend classes all at the same time, in the same facility.



## TIPS FOR REPLICATING SUCCESS

*Padres Unidos* staff have learned the value of creating satisfied participants through their parenting skills program. Staff work hard to help parents overcome barriers to participation, offering child care, snacks, and one-on-one support to families and participants. In addition, the facilitators make the classes engaging, offering practical parenting tips and sound guidance. Staff measure success by tracking retention rates and make every effort to help each participant complete the 16-week program. Efforts are paying off, with more than 80% of parents completing the course. These satisfied participants are spreading the word to other parents. Staff who track referral sources attest that former participant referrals are the number one source of new participants.

The key strategies employed by *Padres Unidos* are all sound best practices. Sonoma County shared some tips on replicating success for other SDFSC programs who are trying to strengthen the relationship between monolingual Latino parents and their middle school high-risk children, and between unassimilated Latino parents and their children's school administrators and teachers.

### ***Diversify Funding Sources***

One tribute to the success of *Padres Unidos* is that CAP secured multi-year, local funding sources for *Padres Unidos* through United Way and through the City of Santa Rosa's tax based local gang prevention program ("Measure O"). This funding will sustain *Padres Unidos* through 2008, and potentially beyond.

Program and county staff worked together to create a financial sustainability plan. This plan includes outreach to the community, building relationships with potential local partners, and applying for additional grants. Staff assembled a "road show" complete with a PowerPoint presentation, "press kit" and participant testimonies, and has scheduled several presentations at various community forums. Potential local partners, such as the local police and probation department, have been identified, and staff are working to cultivate relationships and future funding opportunities. A list of state and national foundations was also created, and staff are currently writing grant applications to secure a new wave of long-term funding.

### ***Actively Recruit and Retain Participants***

*Padres Unidos* continues through three primary strategies: outreach to parents; outreach and collaboration with community gatekeepers; and outreach and messaging through local media outlets.

Strategies to recruit parents are personal, direct, and supportive. Referrals from parents who have already participated in the program are the primary source of new participants. An extended recruitment effort involves several venues, such as:

- **Schools:** Recruiters hand-deliver flyers to school administrators and counselors, who in turn recommend the program to parents.

- **Parent Groups:** Recruiters present the program to English language advocacy councils, migrant education, and other parent groups and at events such as Back to School Night and student orientation.
- **Gatekeepers:** These include any community member a parent seeks for support or assistance. Examples included school personnel, clinics, community-based organizations that work with youth and parents, Child Protective Services (CPS), and law enforcement.

Media and marketing is another important aspect of recruitment. Flyers are left in waiting rooms where parents receive services from other providers. A new bilingual brochure was also developed. Two radio appearances on local Spanish-speaking radio stations by the *Padres Unidos* facilitator and family advocate aided in recruiting for the program and increasing name recognition. At least one parent noted they heard about the class through radio advertisements. Two ads were run in *La Voz*, a Sonoma County bilingual Spanish-English newspaper. *La Voz* also featured the *Padres Unidos* Program Manager as the “Person of the Month,” and placed this article alongside the *Padres Unidos* program ad. Talking points and press releases were also developed with the assistance of a marketing consultant. These materials were used to promote the program through newly identified media channels in Round I.

Presentations and speaking engagements also help to recruit participants to the program. One key success was highlighted through two special meetings with the Santa Rosa

City School District personnel. *Padres Unidos* staff was invited to present their program overview at both the Superintendents’ meeting and the District Administrators’ and Principals’ meeting. Parents volunteered as speakers and helped program staff present the *Padres Unidos* program to school staff and community groups such as the Alcohol and Other Drugs Advisory Board. Project staff also customized workshops for school staff and parents. These workshops served a twofold goal of providing a short, topic specific skill building session, while also serving as a recruiting session for the *Padres Unidos* intensive program.

*Padres Unidos* created a consortium, which provided many opportunities for increased collaboration and expansion of services. Early on in program implementation, partners convened several times to make plans for the development of joint marketing materials in order to attract funders and promote *Padres Unidos/Parent Project* across the county. A consultant led the group in developing a calendar of *Parent Project* and *Padres Unidos* course offerings, as well as talking points to attract partners and funders. The group met two more times to collaborate on the development of a press kit and news media “calendar” publicity, and a mini-brochure to introduce consumers to the *Parent Project* classes in both Spanish and English. Calendar publicity was emailed on two occasions to 13 local newspapers, seven local broadcast media, and five online calendars/wire services. This was in addition to the extensive word-of-mouth, campus-based, listserv, and other promotions achieved by individual agencies.

## **Outreach**

A true collaborative effort of the community was undertaken with *Padres Unidos* to make the program a success. The outreach effort was perhaps the most significant aspect in bringing all the people and parts together to ensure that the program continues in the coming years. It was critical that the right staff be on board to recruit participants and maintain the program. Facilitators also needed to have extensive experience in the community. These factors were significant in establishing the program, giving the program credibility, retaining participants, and fostering partnerships with other local agencies in the community.

*"The outreach was one of the most effective components. Anytime, anywhere, anyone, who wants to have a presentation, we'll be there. We focus on parents, but more on the people who have connections to parents. We typically get larger class sizes because of that outreach aspect."*

— Vince Harper, Director of Youth & Neighborhood Services

*Padres Unidos* staff offer this advice on common issues to address when working with Latino families, including:

**Transportation:** Keep in mind your location may not be on a direct bus route, which could add additional hours of time. Traveling by public transportation with an infant, stroller, diaper bag, and toddler is extremely difficult. If the meeting location requires extensive directions to find (e.g. Hospital, third floor, meeting room B, in nurses lounge) you may lose participants along the way who are not fluent with the language or

who are semi-literate in their own language and miss any posted signs.

Transportation also requires parking meters, garage fees, etc. Many may not possess a valid driver's license or insurance and will not risk being stopped unless it is an absolute emergency. California has strict laws regarding child safety seats in vehicles.

**Discipline:** Corporal punishment and strict rules of behavior are more the cultural norm for parents participating in this program. Therefore, when talking about discipline, state what the law considers abuse and what is reasonable and lawful in California. Parents often feel that their authority has been undermined because their children know more about child abuse laws, and it is then used to threaten or intimidate parents (i.e., "If you hit me, I'll call the cops on you!" "If you don't let me go, I'll tell the cops you hit me and they'll deport you!") Provide parents with plenty of useful substitutions for physical punishment. Role playing is especially helpful to model appropriate behavior and to have parents practice their new skills in a supportive environment.

It is not uncommon for fathers to deliberately avoid giving verbal praise or show physical affection. A suggested icebreaker is to have the parent(s) introduce their child and state something positive about her or him.

**Childcare:** Many Latino families may be very willing to attend, but need childcare in order to do so. Many parents are not comfortable leaving their child with someone they do not know well. Childcare costs may also be

prohibitive. Families may live in situations where it is not “safe” to leave even older children/teens without parental supervision.

**Motivational Supports:** Provide parents with local family “things to do” that are low cost or free. Many parents, especially fathers, have two jobs or a weekend job in addition to their full-time position during the week to cover the family expenses. Family time is often limited and money is typically a concern when affording recreation activities.

**Traditional Families:** Women may adhere to culturally traditional roles within the family: i.e. having dinner at a set time and being the primary caretakers not only for their own children, but also for grandchildren, nieces/nephews, and/or aging parents. They may have extended family members who require food or laundry preparation to work. Some circumstances might require the involvement of both parents or the approval of the father figure in order to make a decision.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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