

VII. The Latino Consortium

Background Information on the Latino Consortium

In the mid 1990s a group of eight Chicago private agencies under contract with DCFS to provide child welfare services to Latino children and their families came together to develop a consortium of agencies whose primary interest was to improve the services for Latino families in Cook County.

The founding charter members consisted of the following child welfare agencies: Association House, Casa Central, Catholic Charities of Chicago, Chicago Commons, ChildServ, Latino Youth Services, Lifelink/Bensenville Home Society, the Mexican Community Center of South Chicago, and Youth Outreach Services.

The mission of the Latino Consortium is as follows:

- Provides a holistic array of community-based bilingual and culturally competent social services to Latino children and families, through agencies who have demonstrated mission-based planning in its services to Latino children and families, as well as dedicated substantial resources to serving Latino families.
- In their continued commitment to the Latino community, the Consortium will seek to build the capacity of other organizations to provide culturally competent services of unmet needs.

The Department has always engaged in collaborative discussions with the Latino Consortium in an effort to meet the needs of the Latino children and families involved with the State's Child Welfare System and supported the Latino Consortium's mission. To this end, in the early summer of 1996, the Department funded a planning grant to hire two consultants to work on the development of the Latino Consortium and assigned a DCFS staff liaison to the project.

In December of 1996, IDCFS proposed a broad framework for a finalized Latino Consortium model. This model recognized the Latino Consortium as the care manager for the Latino children who needed substitute care services with the expectation that eventually, the Latino Consortium will play this role for all Latino children in private agency care. While substitute care formed the core of the Latino Consortium's services in this model, the goal was that the Latino Consortium would eventually provide a complete array of intact family, post-reunification and basic services for Latino families in their respective communities.

The Latino Consortium is meeting the substitute care needs as well as the service needs of Spanish-speaking children and families entering the child welfare system in Cook County, thus fulfilling the Consortium's mission as well as its commitment and obligations to this population. Most of the Consortium's member agencies are rated in the top half among all contracted child welfare agencies in

terms of permanency and caseload ratios. The Latino Consortium has provided bilingual child welfare services to hundreds of Hispanic cases assigned to them from July 1998 through this date.

Our Impact on Services Delivery through September 2005:

The Latino Consortium has been able to deliver, in collaboration with DCFS, a holistic array of community based, linguistically and culturally competent social services for Latino children and families. We constitute a forum where Latino child welfare issues, needs and concerns are being discussed. Some of our efforts include the following:

- Reduced the length of stay of Latino children requiring traditional foster care services being placed at the emergency shelter facilities by sharing resources among Consortium member agencies and by keeping track of placement disruptions among agencies from this Consortium, as well as children being served by non-member agencies and DCFS regions. Better communication among member agencies is producing better results for Burgos cases at the shelter, e.g., we have been able to deflect cases from the shelter by finding resources and services when potential disruptions have occurred.
- Help DCFS with the training activities of Spanish-speaking foster families. We assist the Chicago City Colleges with access to our foster care trainers to support their PRIDE training in the Spanish language and access to our buildings to accommodate families in the training process. This assistance is also extended to the families recruited by DCFS.
- Assist DCFS in monitoring and improving its System of Care network by ensuring SOC providers are able to respond to Spanish-speaking referrals from our membership agencies. Our work yielded a number of recommendations, which have been implemented by DCFS. The changes improved services and ensured that providers are in compliance with their program plan and that no children or caregivers are rejected or services delayed because of language barriers. Some of the activities worth mentioning are: Providers are increasing their efforts to attract bilingual therapists to their work force; providers are willing to sub-contract with bilingual professionals who have the experience and credentials to offer services; and providers are willing to initiate a round of meetings with our membership to discuss and develop a better working relationship.
- Developed tools to inventory the number of foster care resources available to this Consortium. For the first time since its creation the Consortium is able to pinpoint with some accuracy the number of foster care resources it has available. Access to this information will be useful in developing:
 - Reports to reflect the utilization and availability of our foster care resources.
 - A marketing plan to ensure the expansion of the present pool of Spanish-speaking foster homes available through the Consortium.

- Improved communication with other service providers. We are able to assist non-member agencies searching for resources for their Latino clients, e.g., placing Spanish-speaking children whose placement disrupts at one of their foster homes, providing referral services and when needed, assisting providers in finding bilingual resources for their clients.
- Publish and update the community Bilingual Services Resource Directory which is routinely consulted by members and non-members alike.
- Periodically publish the Hispanic Family Profile; the 2005 version is its 6th edition.
- Expanded membership criteria and initiated recruitment of providers in the child welfare field who routinely work with the Latino population.
- We are in the early stages of a bilingual foster parent and social worker recruitment campaign to address the chronic shortage of both in the child welfare field.
- The Consortium collaborates with Loyola University, The Mexican Consulate General and IDCFS to develop a child welfare practitioner training project to further develop the ability of workers in the field to serve Latinos in a culturally competent manner. The project, funded by the US DHHS, is starting in FY2006.