

Coalition takes the lead in researching Latino needs

In response to the state's growing population of Latinos, University of Nevada Cooperative Extension partnered with Nevada's Latino Research Center to conduct the first statewide Latino program needs assessment.

"This study will provide a baseline for Nevada," said JoAnne Skelly, Carson City/Storey County extension educator. Skelly and Loretta Singletary, Lyon County extension educator, conceived the idea during a Spanish Immersion Institute held in summer 2007.

Only two other states have published extension program needs assessments focusing on the Latino population, putting Nevada at the national forefront of this research.

"We started this project because no primary data exist, and yet our Latino population is a growing and important audience when it comes to outreach programs in Nevada," Singletary said. In 2006, Latinos comprised 23.5 percent of Nevada's population.

Skelly and Singletary in turn partnered with Emma Sepúlveda-Pulvirenti, Latino Research Center director and professor of foreign languages and literatures, and Cooperative Extension research assistant Jessica Angle, who is bilingual. The team developed an assessment instrument that was distributed at public meetings in 10 Nevada counties by Angle and community volunteers. Research indicates that face-to-face meetings with a native Spanish speaker are more effective in gathering information from Latinos than conducting surveys via mail or telephone.

The research team selected the counties based on the percentage of Latinos living there, according to the most recent U.S. Census Bureau data. The meetings provided a geo-



Volunteer Carmen Caldera, community-based instructor Zoraida Caldera and Nevada research assistant Jessica Angle staff the Cooperative Extension Latino booth at the Women's and Family Fair in Las Vegas in March 2008.

graphic cross-section of both rural and urban communities. The survey did not collect any sensitive or confidential information, nor does it attempt to contact individual participants.

Cooperative Extension will publish the survey results in summer 2008 and distribute them statewide to the public. This information will be valuable to the Latino population, Nevada communities and public assistance agencies wishing to better target their services. Cooperative Extension educators will also use the results to create outreach educational programs to address documented needs.

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Reaching out to Latino youth

To increase outreach to Latino youth in Carson City, JoAnne Skelly piloted a program for Latino teen girls, Alliance of Latinas in Teen Action and Solidarity,

Results of ALITAS Program

- Parents of participants report an improvement in their daughters' success in school.
- Participants say their relationships with their mothers have improved.
- Participants are more involved in community service activities.
- Teen graduates liked the program so much they asked to serve as mentors for younger girls.
- Cooperative Extension has started a similar program for Latino teen boys.

(ALITAS) in January 2007.

Bilingual community-based instructor Leticia Servin held weekly programs after school and on Saturdays at Carson Middle School and Eagle Valley Middle School.

The program, based on a nationally recognized curriculum, focused on helping participants improve their grades, communicate better, build self-esteem and learn team-building skills. About 35 girls participated at each school.

—Susan Schmidt '08, journalism intern with Cooperative Extension, and Claudene Wharton '86, '99M.A., a Cooperative Extension public information officer, co-authored this article.

Photo by Vincent Angle