



U.S. Department of Education ■ Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools

# Mentoring Resource Center



## CASE STUDIES IN YOUTH MENTORING

# Delivering Culturally Competent Mentoring Services to Low-Income Latino Youth

## Padrinos Barrio Mentoring Project, Tucson, Arizona

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### Introduction

The Padrinos Barrio Mentoring Project is a one-to-one, adult-youth, school-based mentoring program developed from a collaborative between Luz Social Services, Inc., Luz Southside Coalition, and Wakefield Middle School. Located in the heart of Tucson's Southside, Wakefield Middle School's student population is 90 percent Latino and the free and reduced-price lunch rate is 93 percent. In addition to high poverty rates, the Southside of Tucson is plagued by violent crime: adult and juvenile arrest rates for violent crimes are more than four times higher in the Southside than the rest of the state and the homicide rate is 15 times higher than the state average. Needs assessment data collected by the state of Arizona indicate drug and alcohol use is higher and age of onset is lower for alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs (ATOD) among Southside youth compared with youth statewide and nationwide. Given these socioeconomic factors, it is not surprising that Wakefield Middle School is an underperforming school: it has not met Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) as specified by the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) for four of the past five school years.

The Padrinos Barrio Mentoring Project uses a unique approach to serve this severely at-risk student population. The program is grounded in mentoring best practices developed by Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, which emphasize a low student-to-mentor ratio, frequent contact between mentor and student, a youth-development focus, and mentoring relationships of 12 months or longer. In addition, the Padrinos Barrio Mentoring Project incorporates elements from Mexican culture into the program to foster a sense of cultural pride and increase mentees' self-esteem and sense of belonging to a positive community. Through this culturally competent best practice mentoring model, the Padrinos Barrio Mentoring Project ultimately aims to improve academic performance and school attendance, promote healthy decision making, establish positive relationships between mentors, students, their parents, and school staff, and provide a traditional cultural context within which to support and monitor youth development.

## Program Description

The mission of Luz Social Services, Inc., founded by Dr. Pepe Barrón, is to provide leadership in the delivery of culturally competent prevention, education, and treatment services for the Latino community through advocacy, community mobilization, and research. In 1989, Luz Social Services began providing prevention and early intervention services to Latinos in Tucson with funding from the Administration on Children, Youth, and Families of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Subsequent grants from the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP), the U.S. Department of Education (USED), the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), the Arizona Governor's Division of Drug Policy, and the Southern Arizona AIDS Foundation allowed Luz to expand its services.

In 1997, as a response to the drive-by shooting of 12-year-old Raymundo Caiz in Tucson's Southside, the Latino community mobilized to demand action. Numerous meetings were held with Luz staff, community members, and community leaders. In response, Luz Social Services wrote a proposal to the Community Partnership of Southern Arizona—the Regional Behavioral Health Authority—and won funding to officially develop the Luz Southside Coalition. Since then, the Coalition has provided bilingual, culturally competent services in the areas of drug and alcohol prevention, parenting education, financial literacy, and mentoring.

The Padrinos Barrio Mentoring Project successfully combines a best practice mentoring model similar to Big Brothers Big Sisters with its own culturally relevant version of group mentoring. One-on-one mentoring allows mentee-mentor pairs to build meaningful, personal relationships, while group mentoring incorporates the Mexican tradition of *compadrazgo* into the program. Specifically, *compadrazgo* is a support system that ensures the success of important rites of passage, such as baptisms, *quinceañeras*, school graduations, and weddings. *Compadres* are essentially co-parents chosen by family members to help the family guide youth through their social and emotional development. In the Padrinos Barrio Mentoring project, each mentor serves as the metaphoric *padrino/madrina* (godfather/godmother) for their respective mentee and the other mentors function as *compadres*, creating the Mexican support system of *compadrazgo*.

Mentee-mentor pairs spend two hours a week developing a one-on-one relationship. One hour a week is devoted to academic enrichment activities, such as tutoring and homework help, while another hour is devoted to fun, social activities that allow the mentee and mentor to get to know each other on a more personal level. In addition, mentees and mentors participate in group activities focusing on traditional Mexican culture. For example, a workshop entitled, ¡Nuestra Cultura! (Our Culture) taught mentors and mentees about Tonantzin (Mother Earth) concepts of traditional Mexican worldview. Other workshop titles included “Systems of Oppression,” “The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo,” and “Who Was César Chávez?”

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Themed group mentoring activities culminate in family-oriented cultural celebrations organized by the mentees and mentors. For example, after learning about *Tonantzin* (Mother Earth), mentees organized a winter celebration in which they read poetry they had written and gave presentations to their family members, mentors, and school staff about the importance of protecting Mother Earth by conserving natural resources. Similarly, the “Who Was César Chávez?” workshop led to a family-oriented César Chávez Day celebration, which included mentee presentations on the meaning of César Chávez Day, poetry, artwork, mariachi music, and a skit written and performed by mentees, entitled “¡Sí Se Puede! (Yes, We Can!).”

Last year, the group mentoring activities collectively culminated in a “Freedom Mural Project” incorporating what students learned about Latino culture into a mural representing the Wakefield Middle School community. One of the mentors guided the mentees through brainstorming, sketching, and boxing in preparation for painting the mural. The final product included a visual representation of people of diverse ages, races, genders, and backgrounds carrying a Mexican flag, images of *La Virgen de Guadalupe* (The Virgin of Guadalupe), and signs that read “¡Sí Se Puede! (Yes, We Can)” and “*Unidos Sin Fronteras* (United without Borders).” Parents, school staff, and mentors were invited to the mural unveiling where students presented a slide show documenting the progress of the mural project and shared their memories of creating the mural together. The students and the “Freedom Mural Project” were also highlighted in *Arizona Hispania*, a local Spanish-language newspaper.



Because the tradition of *compadrazgo* involves participation of extended family members, the Padrinos Barrio Mentoring Project incorporates rites of passage celebrations that bring together mentors, mentees, and their families. These include *Celebración de Iniciación* (Initiation Celebration) to orient the mentor, the mentee, and his or her family to the program and provide an opportunity to begin developing interpersonal relationships; a *Promoción* (Promotion) Ceremony to offer mentees an opportunity to talk about how the program has helped them; and a *Graduación* (Graduation) Ceremony to celebrate mentees’ completion of the program. These ceremonies typically incorporate traditional Mexican meals and entertainment.

Evaluation results show that the Padrinos Barrio Mentoring Project has been successful in achieving its goals. To assess the quality of the matches, Luz administers the Youth Survey developed by Public/Private Ventures (P/PV) annually. Research shows that when mentee-mentor matches are youth centered, when youth are emotionally engaged in the relationships, and when they are satisfied with their mentoring relationships, mentees are more likely to show improvement in attitudes and behaviors (Jucovy, 2002). The Padrinos Barrio Mentoring Project has achieved success in all three of these measures:

- The mean score for items measuring the degree to which the mentee-mentor matches are youth centered was 3.59/4.00 (sd = .5290).
- The mean score for items measuring the degree to which youth are emotionally engaged in the mentor-mentee relationships was 3.75/4.00 (sd = .3260).

- The mean score for mentees who are *dissatisfied* with their mentoring relationships was very low at 1.45/4.00 (sd = .3894).

Clearly, the program is creating matches that are appropriately focused and tremendously satisfying to youth participants.

School-related outcomes were also positive:

- Forty-three (43) percent of mentees improved their grades in core academic subjects.
- Twenty-four (24) percent of mentees had fewer unexcused absences after participating in the mentoring program for one year.

### Best Practices and Strategies

Several strategies contribute to the success of the Padrinos Barrio Mentoring Project. All program staff members are bilingual and bicultural. In addition, they all live in the Southside community they serve. Having bilingual, bicultural staff has helped facilitate buy-in from mentees and their families, Wakefield Middle School staff, and the Southside community.

The program attempts to recruit mentors from Tucson's Southside Latino community in order to match mentees with successful Latino adults with whom they share cultural knowledge and norms. However, volunteerism rates tend to be lower among Latinos, a reality that is reflected in the mentor roster for the Padrinos Barrio Mentoring Program. Despite efforts by program staff to recruit from within the Latino community, in reality, many mentor recruits tend to be white college students from the University of Arizona.

Program staff members have made efforts to bridge the cultural gaps between white mentors and Latino mentees by incorporating information about Mexican culture into the mentor training and providing group mentoring sessions that focus on Mexican culture. As Project Director Nastia Snider-Simon points out, cultural differences between mentees and mentors provide an opportunity for culture sharing. In addition, using college students as mentors makes college seem achievable for mentees, many of whom will be the first in their family to attend college.

Most important, collaboration between mentors, parents, program staff, and school staff helps mentees succeed. Drawing on the Mexican tradition of *compadrazgo* both celebrates Mexican culture and mobilizes multiple sectors of the community to support youth. Incorporating Mexican cultural traditions is a key strategy for obtaining buy-in from mentees' parents, many of whom are immigrants from Mexico and speak only Spanish. The Padrinos Barrio Mentoring Project provides a space for mentees and their families to explore and celebrate their cultural heritage.

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The Padrinos Barrio Mentoring Project also partners with other Luz Social Services communitywide events to broaden services offered to the mentees and their families. Luz hosts several communitywide, family-oriented events throughout the year to celebrate Mexican heritage, such as "Thanksgiving en el Barrio," an event where community members donate and prepare Thanksgiving meals to serve to the homeless; *Las Posadas* (the lodgings), a traditional Mexican Christmas party celebrating the journey of Joseph and Mary; and *Cinco de Mayo*, a celebration of Mexican heritage and an attempt to reclaim this traditionally alcohol-centered festivity and focus instead on substance-free family fun. The Padrinos Barrio Mentoring Project, in collaboration with Luz's *Jovenes Sanos* (Healthy Youth) Project, also organized a *Dia de los Muertos* (Day of the Dead) Celebration for Wakefield

Middle School. For this celebration, mentors and mentees designed altars, baked bread of the dead, and made paper flowers, sugar skulls, and skull masks.

## Program Replicability

School-based mentoring programs for minority youth can successfully adapt the strategies developed and implemented by Luz Social Services by adhering to the following guidelines:

- Hire bicultural, bilingual program staff from the target community. Not only will they bring cultural knowledge and norms to the program, but they will lend credibility to the program, thereby facilitating buy-in from mentees and their families.
- Develop partnerships with the school, parents, and community members/leaders to provide a broader range of services and activities to mentees.
- Provide cultural training as part of the mentor orientation, as it is unlikely that all mentors will share the same cultural background as mentees. Also, encourage cultural sharing between mentors and mentees.
- Move beyond simply implementing culturally relevant activities or curricula. Structure the mentoring program according to broader cultural value systems, as Luz did with the incorporation of *compadrazgo*.

The model of cultural competency that Luz has designed and implemented works best with a homogeneous minority population since the entire program is built on Latino cultural values and Mexican traditions. The program can be implemented with other homogeneous minority populations as long as program staff members have sufficient understanding of the target population's cultural values and traditions.

You can learn more about the work of Luz Social Services and the Southside Coalition on the Luz Web site at: <http://www.luzsocialservices.org/>

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## References

Jucovy, L. (2002). *Measuring the quality of mentor-youth relationships: A tool for mentoring programs*. Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, National Mentoring Center.