

The Esperanza Report



Esperanza para la Familia

In myriad ways,
the traditions
Latinos bring to
America enrich
our society.



Brightening Lives.
Building Futures.



Report on Esperanza para la Familia

Helping Latinos live happy, healthy lives and fulfill their potential

The following report describes Esperanza para la Familia (“Hope for the Family”), a federally funded four-year program developed and coordinated by Mattie Rhodes Center, and the improvements it fostered.

Mattie Rhodes, the organization’s namesake, was only 18 when she died of typhoid fever in 1890. A group at her Sunday school helped start a foundation that honored their friend Mattie by helping those less fortunate. Their small efforts have since led to serving tens of thousands of Kansas City’s children and families through youth development, family services and art programming.



The Latino community
adds vibrancy and color
to our culture.



Rationale for the Project

Mental health is a major issue facing America today. Concerns are even more acute in Hispanic communities across the nation.

These concerns underlie the rationale for the Esperanza para la Familia project, which came after Mattie Rhodes Center realized the importance of meeting children and families in an area that would best suit their needs. Almost by coincidence around the same time the Kansas City Missouri Health Department had just completed a strategic plan which identified the importance of providing increased services to the Latino community and providing mental health services. This provided the rationale for a larger organization, the Health Department, to collaborate with a smaller community-based provider like Mattie Rhodes Center, which specialized in both.

In Kansas City, a need was identified to address issues such as language differences in the Latino population, especially newly arrived immigrant families. Enrollment for the Kansas City, Mo., School District has shown a substantial increase in recent years, particularly at the elementary level. An alarming trend has been the decrease in high school enrollment. Causes include the language barrier with school employees and the lack of a support system for new immigrants, making it difficult for the parents to get involved in their children’s education.

Reflecting the name of the grant, “Building Mentally Healthy Communities,” the Esperanza project focused on prevention and intervention, which have often have been shown to halve the development of antisocial behavior. Children are not able to focus on school lessons when their home life is in disarray. So the comprehensive program was built on the strengths and cohesiveness of the Latino family.

The use of the family’s native language has been critical in therapy sessions, as well as bridging the communication gap between parents and community resources such as school employees and health providers.

Throughout Esperanza’s implementation, Advisory Groups were used in varying roles. Each quarter, both parents and children were asked for feedback on what types of services should be conducted and how services could be improved. These groups were critical to the project’s success.

The rationale for the Esperanza project therefore focused on the need to address significant risk factors by establishing a comprehensive mental health system focused on the Latino population. The project was also designed to offer culturally appropriate early prevention to impact the school dropout rate.

Building Mentally Healthy Communities

The goal of Esperanza para la Familia was to increase the capacity of Kansas City to build a mentally healthy community through prevention and early intervention, especially in the Latino community. Specific objectives included looking at ways to ensure that the model established

would be consumer-driven with linkages to a wide array of community agencies.

To develop linkages, the Kansas City Health Department led a citywide coalition composed of consumers, community agency staff, local and state health and mental health department officials and interested general public. This group conducted a needs assessment (described in the next section) and examined resources and gaps before developing an action plan to address the needs identified. Mattie Rhodes Center implemented the prevention and early intervention activities.

Determining the Community's Needs

To identify the Hispanic community's needs, the Kansas City Health Department conducted a mental health needs assessment. Respondents said they would seek help when having "bad relations with others" (33%) or when "feeling depressed" (68%). Data also indicated that Latinos would most likely use mental health services that are accessible and sensitive to their language and culture.

The health department surveyed 487 individuals and conducted seven focus groups. Results showed that Hispanics:

- Perceived discrimination by the formal mental health system.
- Preferred receiving services in community-based agencies where they knew the individual understood them.
- Needed information in Spanish about mental health services, including availability and eligibility.

Esperanza para la Familia was developed and conducted in partnership with the Kansas City Health Department. Funding was provided by a \$1.2 million grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) through Prevention and Early Intervention to Build Mentally Healthy Communities.

Five Tenets of Esperanza para la Familia

The Esperanza para la Familia program was built on these guiding tenets:

1. Complex challenges require comprehensive solutions.
2. Strong families are better equipped to cope with adversity and to provide healthy environments for their children.
3. Comprehensive solutions should include prevention and early intervention.

4. Collaborative relationships with parents help maximize family and community strengths.

5. Ongoing evaluation is a key program element.

In addition, the program was designed to address the lack of Spanish-speaking and culturally competent services for Hispanic families in the Kansas City, Mo., School District.

Overview of Esperanza para la Familia

Using a best practices approach, PATHS ("Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies") was selected as the primary means for implementing Esperanza para la Familia.

PATHS is a school-based prevention program to improve children's mental competency. It promotes emotional competencies, such as self-control and problem-solving skills. In the first year, the PATHS curriculum was introduced into kindergarten and first grade at two Kansas City elementary schools – Primitivo Garcia School on Kansas City's West Side and McCoy School in the Northeast area. In the second year, second and third grades were added, and by the third year the program had expanded to include fourth and fifth grades in both schools.

Esperanza para la Familia also reached the children's families through Counseling, Parenting Groups, Art Education and Case Management services.

The Community Served

During the four-year Esperanza program, a total of 391 individuals were served, representing at least 103 families.

Noteworthy demographics included:

- Nearly two-thirds were female, both women and girls.
- Over 97% were Hispanic, with 95% speaking mostly Spanish.
- Of those 17 and older, nearly half had at least a grade school education and one-fourth had completed high school.
- Nearly half of the adults were employed and almost one-third were homemakers.
- Nearly 20% of the adults had presenting problems with depression.
- 70% of the families had two or three children.
- About one-third of the parents reported school problems, including language difficulties, arguing and incomplete homework.



Esperanza para
la Familia reached
families through
Counseling,
Parenting Groups,
Art Education
and Case
Management.

How the Two School Populations Compared

The focus of Esperanza para la Familia was on working with Primitivo Garcia and McCoy schools. To determine whether there were any significant demographic differences between the students and parents in the two schools, Mattie Rhodes Center conducted cross-tabulations and “t-test” comparisons.

Findings about parents served by the program included:

- No significant differences in how well they spoke English, educational achievement, employment levels, and parents’ perception of academic problems.
- Slightly more of the McCoy School parents were born in the United States.
- McCoy School parents had an average of nearly three children, while the average for Primitivo Garcia was closer to two children.
- The McCoy parents have been in the United States longer – about 10 years, compared to about 6.5 years for Primitivo Garcia.

Populations Served by Intervention Programs

Counseling Program – In all, 127 individuals participated in a total of nearly 1,000 Counseling sessions, including many referred by the school system. Types of sessions encompassed individual therapy, family therapy and group therapy. Presenting problems that led to seeking counseling included the children’s school problems, depression of children and adults, parenting and marital issues, domestic violence, aggressiveness, anger management and other behavioral issues.

Data showed:

- Nearly 30% had been in the U.S. from two to five years.
- About 40% could speak only a little English.
- Almost half of the parents had children, with the number ranging from one to nine children.
- A little over half of the adults 17 and over were employed.
- Nearly 20% of the adults had a problem with depression.

Parenting Program – A total of 140 parents attended individual and group parenting sessions in a two-year period:

- A third of the parents said their children were “often” or “almost always” hyperactive.
- The most frequent issues of concern were parenting problems, low income, and problems with immigration or getting a job.
- Parents reported feeling sad nearly half the time.

Art Activities – Mattie Rhodes Center offered art activities at each school for both children and families:

- In a one-year period, 523 students participated in such programs as tin art, Turtle Friend and PATHS Bookmarks.
- During a two-year period, Family Art activities served 176 individuals from 47 families.

Case Management – Types of visits included office, home, telephone contacts, community visits and school visits, with time spent ranging from 15 minutes to four hours. A total of 94 individuals received Case Management services. *Characteristics included:*

- Almost all of them were born outside the U.S.
- About 60% did not speak English.
- Just under 40% were employed.
- The number of children in their households ranged from one to six.
- About one-third said their children had an academic problem.

How Results Were Measured

The methodology for measuring Esperanza para la Familia successes encompassed both process and outcome evaluation. All instruments were translated into Spanish.

PATHS – At the beginning and end of the school year, teachers for kindergarten through fifth grade evaluated their students’ progress, including 31 items in four key areas: aggressive behaviors, self-control, concentration and attention, and social and emotional competence. In addition, parents completed 12-question forms about their children’s progress during the school year.

Counseling –

- **Problem Resolution Outcome Survey (PROS)** – Developed by the University of Missouri-Columbia, the instrument’s 21 items asked participants to rate how well they were doing. The survey was completed after the first and fourth visits.
- **Global Assessment of Functioning (GAF)** – Therapists filled out the assessment, using a 100-point scale, during admission, on the fourth visit and then every fourth month thereafter. The instrument is based on axes in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual system of the American Psychiatric Association.
- **Parenting Rating Form** – This instrument asked parents to rate their children’s behavior in 21 areas on a five-point scale.

Parenting Groups – The form used included questions about child behavior, discipline parents used and the impact of Parenting Groups on participants.

Family Art – Participants were asked five questions about the value of their experience, including one on how they planned to use what they learned within their family.

Case Management – The Client Evaluation Form used a five-point scale. Participants rated their need for services, such as finding utilities and legal services. They completed the forms when entering the program, after the fourth visit and in the fourth month.

Outcomes Show Success of Esperanza para la Familia

Outcomes from Esperanza para la Familia were analyzed for each of the program components. Significant findings are outlined below.

PATHS – Pre- and post-tests were conducted with kindergarten and first grade teachers. Students showed significant gains in all positive behaviors such as self-control, as well as decreases in negative behaviors such as aggression.

The most significant positive results occurred in the second and third grades. In one school year, the Teacher Social

Competence Rating Scale showed a decline in aggressive behaviors and an increase in self-control, concentration, and social and emotional competence.

A total of 116 kindergartners and 134 first graders participated in more than 1,300 interventions through PATHS. Progress reports for one school year showed significant gains for the first graders in reading and language skills, art, music, physical education and social development.

Assessment surveys for PATHS were also given to parents, with voluntary completion encouraged by the incentive of a gift certificate. After the first year, parents indicated their children had shown improvements in concentrating, taking turns, identifying theirs and others' feelings, showing good manners and respect, and displaying more positive attitudes. They also interacted more appropriately with their families and showed better self-control. After the second year, all areas showed at least a 50% improvement. The most improvement was in the ability to show feelings and recognizing others' feelings.

Counseling – Parents who attended sessions indicated significant changes in their general functioning and problem-resolution skills. They had developed plans for handling problems, acquired a clearer picture of the goals needed to solve their problems and gained confidence that they could do something to solve their problems.

The parents also noted significant changes in their children, including improvements in listening skills, completing homework, sharing with others and knowing when others felt bad. They also had fewer problems adapting to life in the U.S.

Parenting Groups – Assessment tools showed that parents felt more often that they had someone to talk to, and they reported using more positive methods of discipline and spanking less often. They also felt that their children talked more about things that bothered them and knew when they had done good things.

Art Education – Fifteen teachers were asked to rate student art and how it related to the PATHS curriculum - 80% gave high ratings to their relevance. The ratings were higher at Primitivo Garcia than at McCoy. Family Art also helped bring families closer together both during the sessions and later at home, according to the forms completed.

Case Management – Using a survey form and Alpha Cronbach analysis, individuals indicated their biggest needs were for guidance in paying bills and in being able to get benefits available to them. After receiving Case Management services, most families reported that their problems had lessened in severity.

Gaining Better Perspectives

Perspectives of the Principals

During in-depth interviews, the principals of both participating schools gave high ratings to Esperanza para la Familia. Their feedback and suggestions for improvement included:

Ratings – The McCoy principal gave the program the highest rating, a 5. The Primitivo Garcia principal gave a rating of about 4.5.

Major Contributions to the School - McCoy's principal thought the biggest pluses were the mental health services, having workers in the school, helping case-by-case and connecting to services within the community. Seeing parents come to the school was also a benefit. Primitivo Garcia's principal said the program's effect on Spanish-speaking families was "extremely positive" and improved the "mindset" of teachers. The principal recommended having a PATHS educator in the classroom until teachers were comfortable with the lessons.



Parenting Groups –

"This group has helped me to feel I can talk with my children without being aggressive and screaming at them...That would not have happened before."

— A Parent



Dealing With the Unexpected – McCoy’s principal said the home visits by the Esperanza staff were an unexpected positive that encouraged parents to connect with the school. Primitivo Garcia’s principal appreciated the opportunities for parents from the two schools to meet, talk and learn from each other.

Challenges – McCoy’s principal thought teacher training should be a half-day instead of two full days. Younger teachers needed the full training, but teachers with more than 10 years’ experience already had much of the knowledge provided. Primitivo Garcia’s principal felt that the program’s parameters needed to be better defined because it was difficult to deal with the tremendous number of referrals with varying levels of need. Implementing PATHS in the lower grades first was the correct decision, the principal believed.

Working With the School District – McCoy’s principal recommended working with individual schools rather than districts. The principal also suggested partnering with a larger program such as the Local Investment Corporation (LINC) and developing a state advocate to help “fight battles.” Providing stories that would help people understand families’ struggles would also be helpful. Primitivo Garcia’s principal thought Mattie Rhodes Center’s grant staff were best equipped to work within the system.

Continuing the Program Components – After grant funding ends, activities often stop. But McCoy’s principal is continuing some elements of the program, including the PATHS Kid of the Day. Primitivo Garcia’s principal is continuing the entire PATHS program, incorporating elements into the classrooms’ daily routine.

What’s the legacy of PATHS? Perhaps the words of one principal summed it up: “I realize now what a poor job we were doing with cultural competency prior to the program. We get it.”

Perspectives of the Teachers

Teachers from both Primitivo Garcia and McCoy were invited to participate in focus groups at the end of two successive school years.

In the first year’s groups, all 11 teachers had implemented PATHS and agreed that it helped children show more positive emotions and behaviors. They observed improvements in learning to listen, calm down, express emotions; overcoming shyness; returning positive behaviors; sharing in problem solving; developing alternative behaviors; and being motivated to act appropriately.

The teachers also made recommendations, including starting PATHS at the beginning of the school year, having more time to infuse PATHS into the curriculum, and holding down class size. They wanted continued technical assistance and said they sometimes had difficulty scheduling the PATHS coordinator.

The training was very thorough, teachers thought. It was “my favorite training,” one said. Suggested improvements included more role-playing, having curriculum copies for each teacher and having children show how to do the activities.

Discussions and recommendations from the second year’s focus group were similar. “Definitely worthwhile,” one teacher commented. The best part of PATHS, many said, was that children treated each other with more respect, gained self-esteem and learned that it was OK to have emotions. Other benefits were that the children improved academically, were more polite and friendly in classes and could express feelings better.

PATHS helped the teachers, too, by helping them redirect their anger. One said having the Kid of the Day helped get the morning off to a good start. Some suggested the program would be even better if it were a

school initiative, with teachers trained as trainers. Lack of parent involvement was a concern, and more funding to expand the program was recommended.

Perspectives of the Parents

Feedback provided insights into the Parenting Group program’s success:

Helping Families – As one explained: “This group has helped me to feel I can talk with my children without being aggressive and screaming at them... That would not have happened before.”

Sharing Concerns – It was “like finding the missing piece to the puzzle,” a parent said. “We have been able to share problems however big or small. It makes me proud that we have developed the trust among each other that we can share the good and the bad in our group.”

Educational Experiences – “Sometimes in the videos or situations presented one can see one’s own family dynamics,” a parent said, “and one can realize that we are living in the same situation in our own home or life.”

The group also helped parents feel strong and united. According to one parent, their motto now is “Si se puede!” (“Yes, we can.”).

Perspectives of the Children

The children also gave feedback on how PATHS helped them:

Avoiding Fights – Using Turtle, a stuffed toy they could talk to, helped them calm down. “During recess I wanted to fight a kid. I used Turtle not to be so mad,” one said.

Behavior Changes – Using “codes” helped children control their actions. As one child described it: “Red light means ‘Stop and calm down.’ The yellow light means to slow down and think, and the green light means ‘Go try my plan and see if it works!’”

Favorite PATHS Sections – Students were especially excited about wearing the Kid of the Day sticker. They also liked taking home the paper with “nice things” their classmates said about them, such as being “a good reader.”

Esperanza para la Familia

Lessons Learned

What makes a program both effective and culturally sensitive? That's what Mattie Rhodes Center has gleaned in the course of implementing Esperanza para la Familia programs in Kansas City's schools and Latino communities. The federally funded four-year Esperanza program provided prevention and intervention services to improve the lives of Hispanic families in Kansas City.

Following are recommendations that can be applied when developing programs in other communities with large immigrant populations.

How to Apply Lessons Learned

Here are best practices recommendations for school-based programs:

Encourage Full Commitment From the Schools – The school administration needs to demonstrate 100% commitment to the program. When other requirements such as Leave No Child Behind put pressure on teachers to raise test scores, it becomes more difficult to implement a nonacademic program like PATHS (“Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies”).

Plan for Uncertainties in Using Federal Grants – By the time an agency works through the bureaucracy and obtains a federal grant, it's time to start implementing the program. Prepare for the uncertainties in funding, which can also make it difficult to hire and retain staff.

Consider Schools' Personalities – Each school community has a distinct personality and structure as well as different resources. So, when more than one school is involved in a program, flexibility in implementation is essential while still fulfilling any grant requirements.

Communicate at All Levels – Ongoing communication with school leadership is needed to keep them involved. This also engages them when new concerns are raised.

Adapt to Changes in Relationships – Interactions with school staff evolve over months and years, and staff changes will affect relationships. Program administrators must be prepared to adapt to these changes.

Avoid Involvement in School Personnel Issues – Those operating a community service program should be aware that even passive participation in personnel issues can create problems.

Provide Ongoing Support – Hiring an educator helps ensure successful implementation of the PATHS curriculum and building relationships with teachers.

Offer Culturally Acceptable Services – Participants should not have to adapt to a different cultural system. Using cultural art is one example of a culturally appropriate service.

Allow for Agency Staff Members' Strengths – Individual preferences and strengths of the staff selected will affect service delivery. For example, one therapist in the Esperanza program preferred her office for counseling sessions while another therapist had no preference among home, school and office visits.

Provide Information to Immigrant Families – Because immigrant families hear many conflicting stories, providing accurate information is especially important. As one parent said: “Here we learn about resources and programs that can help our family.”

Involve the Parents – Parents are often eager to participate. They are more likely to get involved when activities were held at the school and if childcare is provided. Parents also want more information, and those who have not learned English will need assistance to bridge between home and school.

Provide Transportation – Consider purchasing a van since lack of transportation, especially for parents with small children, makes it hard for them to participate.

Monitor Program Evaluation – Involve all program staff in evaluating the program, but channel data through one person to ensure accuracy.



“We hope that
our experiences –
and the results
we achieved –
will serve as
an inspiration
to other
communities.”

— John Fierro
Executive Director



Latinos will use culturally sensitive mental health services.



Brightening Lives.
Building Futures.

Long-Term Recommendations for Serving Immigrant Communities

Best practices ideas for implementation include:

Ensure That Latinos Have Access to Mental Health Care – Latinos need mental health services and will use them when they fit into their culture. Program outcomes show that they benefit from care and will continue to come for therapy visits. Their functioning level improves and their children’s behavior also shows definite improvement.

Link Counseling With Schools – In Mexico, parents normally don’t advocate for their child or participate in school activities. Lack of bilingual counseling also deters parents. Thus, it is critical to link schools with an agency providing culturally connected, bilingual counseling. A program such as Esperanza para la Familia helps involve parents in the school, which in turn helps schools succeed in the academic process.

Facilitate Parenting in a Support Group Atmosphere – Parenting groups offer many benefits for both the adults and their children. Esperanza program results show that providing facilitation in the culture and language of the community strengthens families while helping children grow strong. Other keys to success include conducting activities in the community and having art projects that are culturally connected.

Encourage School Districts to Look for Alternative Resources - To build capacity, school districts should seek funding for culturally acceptable programs from federal, state and local sources. This will enable them to address mental health issues they are facing more effectively.

Ensure That Participant Advisory Groups Have an Ongoing Role - Advisory groups are critical to program success. They offer feedback on how to conduct programs and outreach, and often recommend helpful improvements.

Provide Ongoing Implementation of PATHS in Schools - Integrating PATHS into ongoing instruction of all subjects enhances its positive outcomes. Both parents and teachers see improvements in children’s behavior. Teachers also report that they can teach better because their classrooms are more orderly and disciplined. Children express their feelings more positively and learn to give and receive compliments.

How Mattie Rhodes Center Can Help Your Organization...

We invite you to contact our Development Director for a copy of the full Esperanza report and to find out how we can help your organization develop culturally competent programs to better serve Latinos in your community.

Mattie Rhodes Center

1740 Jefferson Street
Kansas City, Missouri 64108
Phone: 816.471.2536
Fax: 816.471.2521
Web: www.mattierhodes.org

