

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

ASPIRA Association, Inc. The ASPIRA Youth Development Model: A Tool for Building Protective Factors to Combat Juvenile Delinquency

The purpose of the project is to expand ASPIRA's Youth Leadership Development Model as a tool for combating juvenile delinquency by addressing risk and protective factors through the ASPIRA Youth-Leadership Curriculum. The project will demonstrate the efficacy of ASPIRA's leadership model by evaluating the principles of the model through a research-based approach.

The Program expects to: a) significantly expand its youth-development and leadership model through various ASPIRA Clubs in schools and community settings in low-income, inner-city and mostly Latino communities where ASPIRA has offices; and b) document the effectiveness of the model through a rigorous, evaluative process.

The program will implement the ASPIRA leadership curriculum in specific school settings in each of the seven ASPIRA Associates, nationwide. The program will be offered as a continuous program where students will participate for a total of three years, starting as either in middle school or high school through their junior and senior years.

Special emphasis will be placed on serving girls, particularly newcomers to the U.S. who are also at a high risk of dropping out of school and joining gangs. Among the protective factors the program will address and which will be formally incorporated into the ASPIRA Clubs at selected middle and high schools are the following: a) development of resiliency skills; b) asset building; c) positive identity formation; d) self-efficacy and self-confidence; e) family engagement and strengthening; f) leadership development; g) community service; h) social competence; and h) cultural development and awareness.

The program is expected to generate rather important products, such as: comprehensive print and web-based curricula; trainer guides and supplementary program materials; comprehensive data collection and evaluation models/protocols; research papers (for refereed journals) on various aspects of the program; and a Best Practices Manual that can be used by organizations to replicate the program or revise their existing models.

Several characteristics of the program include the following:

- *Sites:* ASPIRA Associate offices in the following cities of Bridgeport, CT; Chicago, IL; Miami, Florida; Newark, NJ; New York City; Philadelphia, PA; and Carolina, PR. Each site will receive a sub-award to conduct the program locally.

- *Number of participants:* About 350 per year (at least 30 per site). In addition, a match, control group of the same number will be identified and followed up at each of the sites to ensure comparability of students for later data analysis and comparisons.
- *Curriculum Development.* Major responsibility for the comprehensive revision of the ASPIRA Leadership Development Club curriculum and the Parent Engagement and Mentoring curriculum will rest with the PD (Hilda Crespo) and Program Specialist. Curriculum Consultants will work under the direction of the Program Director. These will be experts in curriculum development and instruction that also have experience with youth, parents and mentoring programs that will review the curriculum.
- *Evaluation research:* Significant data entry on participant variables and key demographic information and program progress for the evaluation will be entered by local coordinators on an Internet-based, management information system (MIS) specifically designed for the program by ASPIRA Association. In addition, a) other data will be captured through focus groups with students and staff. The evaluation will also b) include other information that will be collected via a project questionnaire for all enrolled students as well as c) a standardized instrument on risk and protective factors and d) focus groups with students and project staff at each site. These instruments and procedures will be administered once a year for each of three years to both the intervention (program) group and the control (comparison) group.

Implementation Plan for ASPIRA Associates

The project will be implemented at all ASPIRA Associate Offices during the first year and each year thereafter. The seven ASPIRA Associate Offices were selected based on prevalence of juvenile delinquency and other risk factors among youth in those neighborhoods.

The project will be operated by full-time, trained ASPIRA Club Facilitators under the supervision of the Director of Counseling at each site. The Facilitators are student advisors already part of ASPIRA staff and whose other duties will be reduced to carry out the proposed expansion of the Clubs. These persons will be responsible for: a) facilitating ASPIRA Club activities; b) data collection through an MIS system; c) monthly and annual reporting; and d) monitoring the overall program at the local level.

Schools, with which the ASPIRA Association and the collaborating organization have long-standing agreements, will serve as centers for the project. Most of the students recruited will be placed in existing ASPIRA Clubs in schools. When placed in existing Clubs, these students will be monitored separately and

offered the two new components of the program. The Clubs will meet at least once per week. Summer activities may be proposed as an addition to regular school-year activities. The Facilitator will deliver the ASPIRA Youth Leadership Development curriculum, but other Club activities (e.g., cultural events, field trips) will be designed by the youth.

All Club members will be required to engage in community service. At least two ASPIRA Club-wide community service events will be conducted by the youth and implemented each year. There are many examples of community service activities, but these can include tutoring or assisting the elderly. Community service hours will be monitored by the Club Facilitator.

Mentoring will be an optional activity. Mentors will be sought to expose youth to positive role models that will share their personal experience with program participants. Mentors will be either caring adults in the community or college-level students who have excelled in school that can serve as peer mentors. Adult mentors will be identified and screened using ASPIRA's screening system. All mentors will be trained using ASPIRA's Facilitators Mentoring Guide by the Club Facilitator. Mentoring will be group mentoring to allow optimal student experiences.

Another optional activity is parent engagement. The Collaborating organizations (ASPIRA Associates) will be encouraged to recruit at least two cohorts of 10 parents/caregivers (no less than a total of 20 per center) . Targets for recruitment will be parents whose children show clear signs of unacceptable behaviors that can turn to delinquent behaviors.

Documentation, Evaluation and Research - Increasing the National Knowledge Base

A major goal of the program is to conduct extensive research and evaluation to ensure it is effective and that it contributes to the knowledge base on juvenile delinquency and best practices in the field. In addition to translating research into practice, ASPIRA will also identify practices that may have policy implications. ASPIRA will contract with Innovative Consultants International (ICI, Inc.) led by Abdin Noboa-Ríos, Ph.D., who has over 30 years experience in the conduct of research and evaluation of similar programs.

The evaluation will focus on documenting both the effectiveness of program implementation (*process* - e.g., participant recruitment, program delivery and program organization/structure) and effectiveness (*outcomes* - actual attainment of the program's measurable objectives). Each of these will be assessed quarterly and yearly throughout project lifespan. Both process and outcome variables will be measured at the program, systems, and individual levels. This will be accomplished by: a) tracking participant progress from intake to program completion and follow-up at 6-month and yearly intervals; b)

assessing individual gains; c) comparing results with that of comparable adolescents not receiving similar services through match-pair statistical analysis; d) documenting corporate capacity enhancement among collaborating organizations; e) assessing progress on curriculum adaptation and implementation; and f) documenting the formation of a national model.

Results will help build evidence-based research and program effectiveness as a model for Latino youth across distinct community sectors and states, including the unique jurisdiction of Puerto Rico.¹ A major component of the evaluation will be a comparison study of participant and non-participant cohorts. At each site, 30 participants will be selected along with a 30 non-participant cohort with demographically similar characteristics that will serve as a control group.² Both groups will be tracked during a three-year period at each site.

Both process and outcome data will be collected from local sites via specific data collection procedures and instruments/protocols tailored to the evaluation. All data will be collected in an Internet-based Management Information System (MIS) designed for the program that will be updated weekly at each site by the Facilitators onsite and by the program's management as well as by the program staff at the National Office and the evaluators.

Specific and measurable positive youth changes will be reflected as enrollees participate in the program. These will include the lessening of risk factors through the development of resiliency skills such as greater social competence, asset strengthening, personal control (e.g., violence/anger control), peer pressure resistance, goal-setting, communication skills, personal achievement, and self-sufficiency and that these changes are the result of their participation in program activities.

Change in student persistence rates will be measured through a variety of methods (e.g., protocols/instruments) as indicated in table 1. To measure progress, each enrollee will be interviewed at intake (baseline data), program completion (graduation), 6-month follow-up³ and yearly follow-ups. Overall, data will be collected to answer both process-level and outcome-level questions for clients as these relate to positive youth development.

Since data will be collected at multiple time points, the evaluation team will provide quarterly results and feedback on goal attainment. The evaluation aims to assess such things as how well enrollment and retention is going, determine

¹ While not included in census counts, the island accounts for nearly 10% of all U.S. Latinos, but more than double its representation in crime, violence, and sexual and substance use (American Community Survey 2006).

² Comparison groups of participants will be matched by key background and demographic variables such as SES, race/ethnicity, age/grade, geographic residence, educational level, family background, juvenile justice history, etc.

³ Comprehensive efforts will be used to track at least 80% of all baseline clients for the 6-month follow-up.

if program staff are implementing the program as envisioned, and whether appropriate measures and instruments are being used. The evaluation team endorses a utilization-focused evaluation approach to enhance both program services and evaluative efforts.

Procedures for client confidentiality will be strictly maintained and compliance with HIPAA regulations will be enforced. Throughout, parent contact information together with parental consent and youth assent agreements will be requested. These will be in both English and Spanish.

The evaluation team will train and orient staff at each site about data gathering methods and procedures for uniform data collection. Through informal surveys, interviews and focus group settings, youth and parents will provide feedback about quality of services and emerging needs for program modification/changes. Most data collection (except survey instruments) will occur through face-to-face encounters or by observation. Data, evaluation and reporting will be consistent with OJJDP standards.

Data findings and implications will be summarized yearly through an annual evaluation report. Dissemination of findings will be presented at key functions, conferences, events as well as published in peer-reviewed journals by end of year three. These will be written by the evaluation team working collaboratively with project staff.

Research - At least one in-depth research project will be undertaken during the third year and submitted for publication in a refereed journal. The specific topic, which will be around the effectiveness of a particular intervention activity and its impact, will be selected among practices that the evaluation shows particularly promise in reducing juvenile delinquency. An ICI, Inc. researcher will select the topic and conduct the research.

Best Practices Manual - As a result of the evaluation and research during the third year ASPIRA will develop a Best Practices Manual, incorporating the successful practices of the program as well as other research and program models that can be used by other organizations across the country. The Manual will be disseminated to the over 100 organizations that partner with ASPIRA across the country. The Manual will include policy issues that have an impact on Latino PYD and that can be addressed at the state and local levels to combat juvenile delinquency and promote PYD in low-income areas.