

## CLASS 1: INTRODUCTION TO ASPIRA AND THE YOUTH LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

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### Objectives:

- To provide an introduction to the history of ASPIRA, logo, Mission, Vision, Process, Leadership Philosophy, Program Descriptions, City-Wide Events
- To allow students to begin to get to know each other and the facilitator
- To allow students to begin thinking about their own and ASPIRA's expectations

### Materials Needed:

- ASPIRA fact sheets, ASPIRA Process information sheets, Initial Assessment forms
- Video, *El Legado* (available from the ASPIRA National Office)
- Computers with Internet access
- Posterboard
- Colorful markers

### Activities:

- Why Are You Interested in the ASPIRA Youth Leadership Development Program?
- Journal Writing
- Semester Goals
- Watch the video entitled, *El Legado*
- Visit the ASPIRA web site at <http://www.aspira.org>

### For Next Time:

- Read "The Crisis of Leadership" by James MacGregor Burns
- Read "Discovering Yourself" by Steven R. Covey
- Read "Knowing Thyself" by Warren Bennis

## WHY ARE YOU INTERESTED IN THE CLASS?

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### **Directions:**

Initiate a discussion on why the members signed up for the program. When they filled out the application, they must have had a reason for wanting to be involved with the Youth Leadership Development Program. What were these motives? What would they like to see as an end result upon finishing the program? Did/ Do they have a particular vision for this course?

### **Skills Development:**

- None

### **Time Needed:**

- 15-20 minutes

### **Materials Needed:**

- Students

## JOURNAL WRITING

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### **Directions:**

Each student will have the opportunity to reflect on the program throughout the semester by maintaining a journal. This journal should be updated on a weekly basis with entries correlating with the material covered in the program. The first entry should be a personal mission statement as well as an outline of their goals for the semester. Observation and description are the key elements to journal writing. Each week thereafter, they will write a reflective entry combining what they have learned in the classroom from the activities and discussions and what they have experienced outside of the classroom that relates to the subject. Finally, the journals should contain a personal philosophy of leadership, statements describing how they are achieving the stated course objectives, and analysis of and impressions of the activities. The last entry of the semester should be a summary discussing what the student has learned about himself and his own development as a leader. The facilitator will collect these journals at the end of the program and they will remain confidential.

### **Skills Development:**

- Enhanced Writing Skills
- Logical Analysis
- Creative Expression
- Application of Theory to Practice

## JOURNAL ENTRY TOPICS

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1. Expectations of the ASPIRA Youth Leadership Development Program. *Class 1*
2. Commentary on *Chemistry and The Spirit of the Golden Rule*. *Class 2*
3. How does my background define who I am as a person? *Class 3*
4. Comment on something you discovered about your community during the History of a Community activity. *Class 4 or 5*
5. Record information from the Internet Scavenger Hunt. *Class 6*
6. Write out your personal definition of leadership. *Class 8*
7. Construct a personal vision statement. *Class 12*
8. Construct a personal mission statement (in class). *Class 12*
9. Write a 2 page critical essay on "Demystifying Multiculturalism" *Class 14*
10. Conflict Management: How do you manage conflict? Did your methods of dealing with conflict change after this activity? *Class 16*
11. Would you rather work with a group or individually? Explain your answer. *Class 18*
12. Make a list of universal human values that you think are necessary for society to function. *Class 20*
13. How am I a young leader? *Class 22*
13. What leader in the Latino community can I most identify with? Why? *Class 23*
15. Commentary on prejudice and stereotyping in reaction to article by Cornel West. *Class 25*
16. How do I envision leaders of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century? How can I be an effective leader in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century? *Class 26*

## SEMESTER GOALS

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### Time Needed:

- 20 minutes (but take longer if needed)

### Objectives:

- To create goals for the class
- To ignite a shared vision for the class
- To remind students of their "leader within"

### Directions:

Brainstorm ideas about what the members of the class aspire to learn from the YLDP. These ideas are their goals. For instance, to be able to understand the process of leadership. List these goals on poster-board and post them around the room during every meeting. This way the students will be reminded of why they are taking the course as well as what they are working toward. These posters will provide motivation for the students throughout the semester. Ask questions such as, How will you, as an individual, develop leadership?

### Skills Development:

- Critical Thinking
- Goal Setting

### Materials Needed:

- Poster-board
- Colorful markers

## WHAT IS ASPIRA?

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The ASPIRA Association, Inc. is the only national nonprofit organization devoted solely to the education and leadership development of Puerto Rican and other Latino youth. ASPIRA takes its name from the Spanish verb *aspirar*, "aspire."

Since 1961 ASPIRA has pursued its mission of empowering the Latino community through the development of its youth. All of ASPIRA's goals and activities spring from one basic belief: Puerto Ricans and Latinos have the collective potential to move their community forward.

ASPIRA looks at Latino youth and sees this potential; leaders waiting to emerge. With community-based offices in large cities of six states and Puerto Rico, ASPIRA's 500 staff members work with over 25,000 youth and their families each year to develop that potential. These are our ***Aspirantes*** -- those youth who will become educated, committed leaders for the community's future benefit.

Since its founding, ASPIRA has provided a quarter of a million youth with the personal resources they need to remain in school and contribute to their community. Most mainland Puerto Rican leaders today were encouraged by ASPIRA during their adolescence.

### **ASPIRA's Mission Statement**

The ASPIRA Association promotes the empowerment of the Puerto Rican and Latino community by developing and nurturing the leadership, intellectual, and cultural potential of its youth so that they may contribute their skills and dedication to the fullest development of the Puerto Rican and Latino community everywhere.

Based on this philosophy, the ASPIRA Association has defined its mission as follows:

*To empower the Puerto Rican and Latino community through advocacy and the education and leadership development of its youth.*

## History of ASPIRA

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In 1961, Dr. Antonia Pantoja and a group of Puerto Rican educators and professionals created ASPIRA (which means aspire in Spanish), to address the exceedingly high drop-out rate and low educational attainment of Puerto Rican youth. They were convinced that the only way to free the Puerto Rican community from poverty and to promote its full development, was by focusing on the education of young people, and developing their leadership potential, self esteem and pride in their cultural heritage. This was the best way, they believed, of ensuring that youth would become not only productive members of society, but leaders the development of their own community. ASPIRA conveyed in its name the expectation that Puerto Rican youth could succeed if they dared to aspire.

After extensive research on youth, ASPIRA founders developed a process for leadership development that remains the core of all ASPIRA activities: The ASPIRA Process.

Since its formation over 37 years ago, ASPIRA has grown from a small nonprofit agency in New York City to a national association with statewide Associate organizations in Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania and Puerto Rico, with its National Officer in Washington, D.C.

In the last three decades, ASPIRA has become an inclusive organization. While still mainly a Puerto Rican organization, it now reaches out to include *all* Latinos and a significant group of non-Latinos throughout the United States. Presently, ASPIRA serves over 25,000 students each year in over 400 schools, through its core activity, the **ASPIRA Clubs**. ASPIRA provides leadership training, career and college counseling, financial aid, scholarship assistance, educational advocacy, cultural activities, and most importantly, continuing opportunities to implement community action projects. Throughout its existence, ASPIRA's commitment to its initial mission of leadership development has remained unchanged. All programs still aim to help Latino youth develop their intellectual and leadership potential so that they can achieve educational excellence and make a long-term contribution to improving their own lives and that of their community.

## Our Founder - Dra. Antonia Pantoja

Dra. Antonia Pantoja was born in San Juan, Puerto Rico and studied at the University of Puerto Rico where she obtained a Normal School Diploma in 1942. Upon graduating from the University of Puerto Rico, she worked as a schoolteacher for two years in Puerto Rico where she cultivated a profound interest in education and addressing the needs of disadvantaged children.

She arrived in New York City in November 1944 where she got a job as a welder in a factory making lamps for children. During these years which involved long hours of hard work, Dra. Pantoja was awakened to the harsh experience of racism and discrimination against Puerto Ricans and how this community lacked the knowledge and political power to overcome these and other challenges in the United States. She became an activist in the factory, providing information to other workers about their rights and how to organize a union. These were the most formative years of her life. But within a few years, the women who welded pieces of filament for submarine radios would rise to weld together a fragmented community, a community much in need of leadership and vision.

After great personal initiative that included doing extensive research on academic scholarships, Dra. Pantoja received a scholarship from Hunter College, City University of New York, where she completed a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1952. She went on to acquire a Master of Social Work in 1954 and was bestowed a Ph.D. from the Union Graduate School, Union on Experimenting Colleges and Universities in Yellow Springs, Ohio in 1973.

Her most profound contribution to the Puerto Rican community in the United States began in 1958 when she joined a group of young professionals in creating the Puerto Rican Forum, Inc. which paved the way for the establishment of ASPIRA in 1961. ASPIRA was Dra. Pantoja's dream, but it was not the only organization she help build for the Puerto Rican community. In fact, as early as 1953, Dra. Pantoja, then a graduate student at Columbia University, joined a group of students and created the Hispanic Youth Adult Association which later became the Puerto Rican Association for Community Affairs (PRACA). In 1970 she wrote a proposal and secured funds to establish the Universidad Boricua and the Puerto Rican Research and Resource Center in Washington, D.C. and in 1973 became its Chancellor. For health reasons, Dra. Pantoja moved to California in 1978 to become

an Associate Professor at the School of Social Work, San Diego State University. There, in collaboration with another successful educator, she founded the Graduate School for Community Development in San Diego, an institution that served communities and neighborhoods throughout the nation. She became the President of this organization, devoted to imparting people with knowledge and skills necessary for problem-solving and restoring their communities. She was involved in a variety of community and professional organizations, all working toward the goal of building stronger Puerto Rican and minority communities, including the Ford Foundation, the National Urban Coalition, the Museo del Barrio, the National Association of Social Workers, the Council on Social Work Education and several other groups and organizations.

Her most notable contribution-the creation of ASPIRA- in 1961 was the result of considerable hard work and collaboration with educators and social work professionals who shared her concern with the high dropout rate of Puerto Rican youth in New York City during the '50s and '60s. The organization flourished into a major national organization dedicated to empowering communities and especially Puerto Rican youth to have a say in and control of their future.

A Well-Deserved Honor:

ASPIRA Founder Awarded Presidential Medal of Freedom

In 1997, Dra. Antonia Pantoja, founder of ASPIRA and legendary for her role in the education and leadership development of Puerto Rican Youth in the United States and Puerto Rico, she received the highest honor the nation bestows on a civilian, the Presidential Medal of Freedom. Dra. Pantoja joined five other Americans of exceptional merit in receiving this award: the late Joseph Cardinal Bernardin, James Brady, Morris Udall, David Hamburg, and Rosa Parks. The medal was awarded by President Clinton at a ceremony at The White House. First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton and other distinguished members of the Administration were in attendance. Dra. Pantoja was also given a Recognition from the United States Congress.

A special reception in Dra. Pantoja's honor was sponsored by the ASPIRA Association and the Puerto Rican Presidential appointees at the White House. Among friends and honored guests in attendance were many *Aspirantes* and ASPIRA National Board Members. Attendees included: The Honorable Donna

Shalala, U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services; Nelson Díaz, General Counsel, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development; former U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Antonia Novello; Josephine Nieves, National Executive Director of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW); Suzanna Valdéz from the White House; Raúl Yzaguirre, President of the National Council of La Paza; and Norma Cantú, Assistant Secretary, U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights. A video about Dra. Pantoja's life was presented as part of the celebration.

## Our Logo - the *Pitirre*

The *Pitirre* is the symbol of ASPIRA. A small tropical bird found in Puerto Rico, the *pitirre* is known for its agility, rapid flight and for its ability to outsmart, tire and defeat much larger birds. ASPIRA believes that the *pitirre* is a fitting symbol for young Latinos. Aspirantes gain the confidence of the *pitirre* by acquiring knowledge and developing their leadership skills. They can face and overcome seemingly overwhelming odds to become productive adults, returning to their communities the benefits of their skills and leadership abilities. The symbol of the *pitirre* reinforces ASPIRA's belief that even the smallest and seemingly powerless can take control of their lives and cause change.



## THE ASPIRA PROCESS

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Over the years, ASPIRA has developed a highly successful intervention model called the ASPIRA Process. The model consciously accentuates the positive, putting the stress on developing the potential of *Aspirantes* rather than on trying to overcome their perceived deficits.

The ASPIRA Process of leadership development teaches youth to become **aware** of their current situation, to **analyze** its consequences, and to take **action** for change in their personal lives and the life of their community. ASPIRA brings together students, parents, school and community members to promote educational success and community service. ASPIRA also works with foundations, corporations, and the government to improve educational opportunities for these young Latinos.

### **AWARENESS**

Having knowledge; being watchful

### **ANALYSIS**

The method of proof in which a known truth is sought as a consequence of a series of deductions from that which is the thing to be proved

### **ACTION**

The state or process of acting or doing a deed

## THE ASPIRA ASSOCIATION

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ASPIRA currently has offices in the Latino communities of major cities in Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, and Puerto Rico. Each local office operates many programs that grow out of the specific conditions of the local site but have in common the ASPIRA Process model and ASPIRA's commitment to leadership development and education.

These local offices, with ASPIRA's broader network of 5,000 community-based organizations, school districts, local and national policy makers, and corporate representatives, receive information and assistance from ASPIRA's Washington, D.C.-based National Office.