



AIDS Outreach and Latinos in Prison

A high proportion of people incarcerated in U.S. prisons are HIV-positive although they generally do not contract the disease while incarcerated (CDC 2000). A 1999 study showed that prison inmates in the United States had a rate of HIV infection that was five times higher than that of the rest of the population (CDC 2000). Furthermore, the study estimated that almost 20% of people infected with the virus in 1996 had been released from prison that year (CDC 2000).

Prisons provide a place to reach out to people who are at risk for contracting the HIV virus. When one considers that 25% of incarcerated people are Latino, one can see the impact that providing HIV services in prisons would have on the Latino community (CDC 2000). Even if some individuals in prisons already have HIV, disseminating information about the disease could help them realize how they can prevent others from contracting the virus, both inside prison and once they are released. HIV prevention programs in prisons can effectively reach some of the most at risk populations, including many Latinos.

In addition, programs that reach out to Latino youth and teach them not only about HIV, but also inspire them to pursue healthy activities and goals which will keep them from being incarcerated are also necessary. The ASPIRA Association recognizes the devastating impact of the HIV virus on the Latino community. To further promote HIV education among Latinos, especially youth, ASPIRA is in the process of creating a curriculum manual for teaching Latino youth about AIDS. The curriculum includes workshops concerning drug prevention, sex education,

setting goals, and overall facts about HIV and AIDS. Students participating in the workshops engage in various activities such as role-play situations to increase their awareness of AIDS and teach them ways to avoid behaviors that put them at risk for contracting the virus. The curriculum also includes a segment for parents focusing on facts about HIV and how to talk to youth about HIV prevention. The programs are directed at Latino youth, providing facts about HIV in the Latino community and featuring young Latino characters such as Enrique and María Elena in stories and skits. ASPIRA's HIV prevention curriculum will help Latino students and their parents not only to understand how to avoid behaviors that put them at risk for contracting AIDS, but also how to empower themselves and achieve their goals.

We must find ways to reach large segments of the populations most vulnerable to contracting the HIV virus. Educating incarcerated individuals about HIV can help keep the disease from spreading further, both inside and outside the prisons, and have a large impact on the Latino community and American society as a whole.