

DUI and Highway Safety Education for Latinos in Cobb and Cherokee Counties

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Note: Power Point slides show additional details and samples of educational materials developed for the project.

According to the Selig Center for Economic Growth at the University of Georgia, the Hispanic population in the state of Georgia will grow from the present 800,000 to almost a million by 2012. Our program goal was to reach people who had difficulty receiving highway safety and DUI information from mainstream English language resources or media avenues, and especially to reach the high risk group of young male workers who might be ignorant of the laws and customs concerning drinking and driving in the United States.

The success of the project depended on the advice and participation of churches, schools, and law enforcement, and leaders among the Latino and immigrant communities. In particular, the leadership of “Pastoral Maya” enabled us to reach 1000s of immigrants face to face. Pastoral Maya represents a group of several thousand Maya Native Americans from Guatemala who settled in Cobb, Cherokee, and North Georgia. The Maya come from the Indian villages in the Guatemalan highlands, and 30 % do not speak advanced Spanish when they arrive. About ½ of the Maya women in Cherokee County and North Georgia do not speak Spanish.

The thousands of Maya Native Americans in Georgia are prime examples of the fact that the demographic group called “Latinos” or “Hispanics” represents a large variety of nationalities, ethnicities, class backgrounds, levels of education, and cultural characteristics. To reach and influence this diverse population, we had to recognize this diversity and exhibit a genuine respect for the various cultures and beliefs.

New immigrants to Georgia presented the main challenge, for many in this group lacked reading skills in any language. We initially made major mistakes in the targeted material that we developed for this population, because we decided to make information pamphlets at a simple reading level, and to employ cartoon pictures to promote our message. Such materials were not effective, because although our target group was adults with low reading skills, they still considered themselves adult and found the material childish. Power point slides, posters, and flash cards failed to capture their attention. We found the most effective way was through conversation, letting them talk about their experiences and letting them frame their own questions. We learned to create materials that were attractive and eye catching, that could be read easily but which looked adult in format. We combined highway safety information with announcements for community fiestas and other popular events, and devised pamphlets which contained additional information of interest, for example a pamphlet in alliance with Cobb County Transit that contained information on riding public transportation. We also had to change our questionnaires, as our original 70 questions were too long and too complex, and we were not getting accurate data. In time we discovered that breaking into groups, having someone read aloud the questions and allowing for discussion was the best way to collect data.

Our most effective way of reaching new immigrants turned out to be through the churches, where we developed some strong partnerships. Festive events such as religious and family celebrations and large events such as the Cinco de Mayo gave us access to many people as well. Important alliances that worked with us on special projects included MUST Ministries, Families of Cherokee United in Service (FOCUS), Cobb Police Department, Cobb County Transit, Cobb County Education, and Cobb County State and Municipal Courts. TV, newspapers, and radio stations also contributed a significant amount of coverage which helped promote our objectives, including the Spanish language television stations “Univision TV” and “Azteca TV”, and the newspaper “Atlanta Latina”.

From the feedback that we received, a highly effective aspect of the program was through radio. In April of 2007 until the end of 2008, we maintained a partnership with Spanish Radio AM 1100, which broadcasts live with good reception in Cobb and Cherokee Counties, and streams the radio program on the website www.hablemosatlanta.net. We broadcast bi-monthly traffic safety programs that covered various traffic and highway safety issues, and invited listeners to call in with questions. Short 15 second education commercials were played throughout the week.

DUI special education workshops for convicted violators of the law became an essential part of the program from 2007. During the workshop the DUI offenders were initially tested for their understanding of the probation sentence they had received and the mandated methods of compliance. About 40% of the time the convicted violator had insufficient understanding of his or her sentence and the probation system, and the consequences of noncompliance. Offenders were tested for their knowledge of DUI and traffic laws, and instructed in the areas they did not know. They were encouraged to talk and tell their stories, and discussions moderated by the workshop leader focused on changing customs and behavior toward traffic safety. The DUI for Offenders program received solid support from the courts, and we had requests but neither budget nor resources to teach the workshops in other counties.

NOTES ON DATA COLLECTION

- National and state studies have shown that Hispanics have a higher risk of traffic injuries and fatal car accidents than non-Hispanic whites, but the information is sketchy and incomplete.
- Published sources have incomplete data, as they do not take into account the great diversity within the Hispanic category and difficulties of identifying or analyzing the new immigrants.
- Published sources are few in number, generally outdated, and we could find no significant published data for Georgia.
- Data on ethnicity is politically and socially sensitive, causing difficulty in data collection.

- Obtaining official data from county or city records proved difficult due to the incomplete information collected and to the difficulty of establishing meaningful information based primarily on the names of the violators.
- Latinos were interviewed about their beliefs and attitudes, and their knowledge about safety and the reasons behind actual crash accidents, but this alone did not produce reliable data.
- We kept data on the participants of our DUI Education class, in order to track the effectiveness of this program, but the program would have to continue for several years before this data would become significant.
- Our most effective method of data collection on the local Latino populations was through questionnaires and interviews.

CONCLUSIONS FOR COBB AND CHEROKEE COUNTIES

- Over 90 % of the Latinos arrested for DUI are men, most of them under 30 years of age.
- Young males of all ethnicities including White are a high-risk group.
- Young Latino males often experience peer pressure to drink after work.
- Due to language and education many have a poor understanding of DUI laws.
- The large number of young male Latinos in DUI court is related to their disadvantaged place in society.
- These groups can be educated, and persuaded to change their behavior. When they thought about the consequences to themselves and to others, they exhibited full understanding and a desire to follow the laws.
- The GOHS/KSU/Burruss Institute partnership demonstrates that academic experts in Spanish culture and language, when working in partnership with the GOHS, can develop effective programs of safety education for Latinos.