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¡Celebrando Familias!

NEW SUPPORT AVAILABLE FOR HISPANIC FAMILIES STRUGGLING WITH THE IMPACT OF SUBSTANCE ABUSING PARENTS

Nothing is more important in shaping the life trajectory of a child than the values he or she learns at home. Children learn through the modeling of their parents, grandparents, siblings, and other caregivers.

But what if that family at home is broken? What if the behaviors modeled are dysfunctional and harmful? Children living in environments where there are serious alcohol or drug problems often live in chronic, trauma-like conditions amid uncertainty, distrust, and domestic violence. Family “norms” prevent all members from sharing real feelings about what goes on at home.

According to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, an estimated one in four U.S. children lives in a family with alcohol abuse or alcoholism. Thousands more live with prescription or illegal drug abusing parents. They all are impacted in many ways, not always obvious to others. They can suffer emotionally, socially and developmentally, and they generally suffer in silence. The more desperate of these young people are more likely to end in the juvenile justice system or become another teenage suicide victim.

“Recent research underscores that such adverse childhood experiences can continue to have huge impacts on children and other family members – even after the substance abusing parent has been through treatment and is in recovery. Alcohol and drug addiction not only damages the afflicted person, it can devastate the family that is not given the help they also need to recover from addiction's impact on them,” said Sis Wenger, President/CEO of the National Association for Children of Alcoholics (NACoA).

Hispanic families, especially recent immigrants, confront additional challenges. Not only language and acculturation, they are often hit harder by the country's economic stresses. Such conditions can further contribute to increased frustration, leading to increased and excessive use of alcohol and other drugs which adversely affect the entire family structure.

“But for those who receive treatment and are in recovery, there has never been a more hopeful time,” said Wenger. “Across the country, recovery support programs are being created and growing in size and number. NACoA is especially proud to receive, at this time, a new effective tool for community-based prevention and recovery support organizations that are addressing the needs of Hispanic families impacted by alcoholism and other drugs. *¡Celebrando Familias!* is an innovative approach to help Spanish speaking families at high risk for substance abuse disorders.”

The program, focused on families in early recovery, is based on the *Celebrating Families!*[™] curriculum listed on the Registry of Evidence-Based Programs and Practices of the Substance



Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. It was developed in response to requests by juvenile dependency court judges who observed that in a majority of their cases, changes in family dynamics were needed to break the intergenerational transmission of substance abuse and domestic violence, and to reestablish bonds and standards of accepted behavior.

¡Celebrando Familias! was translated and culturally adapted by a team of Hispanic program experts through Prevention Partnership International (PPI) of San Jose. It was piloted in Oklahoma and at EMQ-Families First, a statewide California provider of human services that offers education and support programs for children and families. Evaluation of the program revealed that the 16 week *¡Celebrando Familias!* curriculum resulted in significant improvements in the level of parenting skills, family strengths and resilience, and parent social and cognitive skills. It also increased children's developmental assets shown in numerous studies to decrease high risk behaviors, including early use of alcohol and other drugs.

"Conducting this program in my school was life changing for families," recalls Norma Rodriguez, former Principal of Dorsa Elementary School in San Jose. Rodriguez, named "Principal of the Year" by the Association of California School Administrators in 2009, reported that she "saw first-hand that it helped family members learn to communicate with each other."

"In many cases, addicted parents are simply following the behavior that their own parents modeled. They love their kids, but they had never learned how to show it and they had many problems themselves that were often passed from their parents' generation. *¡Celebrando* is helping to break that cycle. It not only taught new parenting skills, it helped families see the importance of doing simple things together, and it also helped them to learn limits and to express differences of opinion while controlling their anger."

While lifelong recovery is possible for an addicted person after treatment and sobriety are attained, it is much more likely to occur when all family members receive age appropriate recovery support addressing the losses and damage they have also suffered from living with and being impacted by a parent with an alcohol or drug use disorder.

"NACoA is thrilled and honored to be able to expand the family healing potential of the *Celebrating Families!*[™] curriculum, now in use in over 30 states. We are grateful to PPI for obtaining the funds and expertise needed to translate and adapt this unique and effective evidence-based program to help entire Hispanic families recover, and for carrying out the work needed to make *¡Celebrando Familias!* a reality. We look forward to reproducing the curriculum and training for its use throughout the country in the very near future," said Wenger.

As trainers and implementers of *Celebrating Families!*[™], NACoA recognizes and thanks the foundations and donors that made this program possible; FIRST 5 Santa Clara County, Cisco Systems Foundation, Hurlbut-Johnson Foundation, Kaiser Community Benefit Grants – Santa Clara, Santa Clara County Medical Alliance, St. Andrews Episcopal Church, and Saratoga Rotary Foundation.