

# ASSEMBLING A CULTURAL TOOLBOX

Service providers receive an education in core Latino values to increase accessibility and improve outcomes on the job.

**Amistades, Inc.**  
www.amistadesinc.org



## Mission:

To provide culturally competent education, prevention and early intervention services to disconnected, underserved youth, immigrant families and the elderly in Pima County and Southern Arizona.

## Initiative:

Through the community-informed Niños Sanos, Hombres Fuertes (Healthy Boys, Strong Men) training initiative, service providers from a variety of sectors gained tools to offer culturally competent services to Latino men and boys.

## Population Served:

A cross-section of workers, including educators, government, and healthcare and other social services providers.

## Geographic Location:

Southern Arizona, covering Pima County south to the Arizona/Mexico border.

## Key Promising Practices Employed:

Nonprofit and Public Sector Partnerships, Addressing Cultural Barriers to Health Access, Weaving Latino Culture Throughout Programming.

Latino men and boys are largely underserved by mainstream providers across all sectors. Amistades, a Latino-led and Latino-serving organization, helps providers to recognize Latino culture and core values that will help them to better identify and more competently serve this group.

**The Project:** Amistades developed, implemented and evaluated Niños Sanos, Hombres Fuertes, a series of eight workshops designed to build and strengthen cultural competence capacity within the network of health, education and other social service providers to improve outcomes for low-income Latino men and boys. The interactive, hands-on workshops covered a range of topics in two-hour sections, including youth violence and crime, underage drinking, mentoring, financial literacy, the school-to-prison pipeline, school readiness and dropout prevention.

Amistades conducted several focus groups in order to incorporate the voice and lived experience of Latino men and boys into the workshops.

“It was very dynamic and we were very deliberate in our branding and our messaging, in terms of introducing this project to the community,” said Claudia Jasso-Stevens, Director of Operations for Amistades. “We valued and needed their input... it would help us in the development of these workshops.”

The project was especially important in Southern Arizona, where anti-Latino sentiment can run deep among service providers. Strong Nonprofit and Public Sector Partnerships proved invaluable for successfully recruiting workshop participants.

“We were very lucky because we already had relationships with school districts, elected officials, other nonprofit organizations, and the university and community college, so we were really able to hit the ground running when we got this award,” said Jasso-Stevens. In total, 351 people attended 12 workshops in six southern Arizona counties; about one half of participants identified as Latino.

Niños Sanos, Hombres Fuertes Addressed Cultural Barriers to Health Access. According to Jasso-Stevens, many service providers do not understand the Latino core value system that must inform effective service delivery, nor do they understand the barriers that impede Latino men and boys from accessing service and programs. Workshops taught participants to recognize these barriers and provided concrete strategies for reaching Latinos where they are.

“We emphasized and taught them that there are other places for them to go where Latinos gather -- their barrios, in the communities, over food, where they are doing laundry -- that there are other nontraditional ways Latinos organize at the community and familial level,” said Jasso-Stevens. Workshop participants shared that the training helped them engage their clients in more sensitive and respectful ways, including the use of Spanish interpreters when dealing with a language barrier.

In Weaving Latino Culture Throughout all of the workshops, facilitators stressed the importance of understanding and validating the history of the people that they serve, noting that this is particularly important with Latino men and boys, who they describe as vulnerable to feeling displaced. Workshops covered important Latino values such as trust, unity, power and family. Jasso-Stevens observed that these teachings had a profound impact on many of the participants.

“When we introduced some of these concepts, people were blown away,” she said. “For Latino participants, the inclusion of Latino core values validated what they already knew and taught them how to utilize and leverage that knowledge in their work. “They know that *familia* is important. They know that Latinos operate differently than other groups, but this helped them to use it in their work in a coordinated way,” she added.

**Lessons Learned and Next Steps:** Niños Sanos, Hombres Fuertes had a positive impact on participants. Ninety percent of participants stated that they were satisfied or very satisfied with the workshops, and 98 percent agreed or strongly agreed that presenters were knowledgeable. Ninety-one percent of participants stated that they understood the importance of improving their cultural competence level. One participant shared:

“I was able to immediately provide my curriculum more effectively to families. I was more mindful to ask questions that help me be more sensitive in the culture

of the families I work with. The families seem to better relate to me as well.”

In addition to helping Amistades build out their training and technical assistance offerings, it cemented their reputation as a “go to” agency for cultural awareness questions. Amistades also cross-trained all staff to deliver the workshops, so that requests for trainings do not become overly burdensome on a few people. Even more profoundly, the project validated the mission and offerings of Amistades and built pride among the employees.

“It was nice to be able to implement a project that was directly aligned with our cultural values, our reason for existing, and our value system as an agency,” said Jasso-Stevens. “It was particularly close to our hearts. And it motivated us to continue to do the work with the community.”

Not all experiences with the program were positive for everyone. Some participants demonstrated apathy and even anger at having to participate in the workshops. This was most evident among providers who were mandated to attend the workshops by their agencies. Amistades believes that these participants are the most important to reach.

“If they are that negative about learning how to work with Latinos, it makes my skin crawl to think about how they are probably delivering services,” said Jasso-Stevens. “So if there is anything we can do to help, it is super important no matter how volatile or difficult it is to work with them. The end user is that Latino male they are serving.”

Amistades plans to continue training providers and acting as a cultural competency resource in its community. It is a key member of the Tucson Mayor’s My Brother’s Keeper challenge initiative, through which they will provide several trainings specific to youth violence and the school-to-prison pipeline. Amistades has also made the Niños Sanos, Hombres Fuertes curriculum available to all its past participants. Amistades would love to enhance the curriculum with train-the-trainer resources that could be sold widely, thus earning income to increase trainings. In addition, it is interested in working directly with agencies to do cultural competency assessments and create organizational action plans to better serve Latino men and boys.