

IMPACT

 University of Idaho
Cooperative
Extension System

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Hispanic Adults Learn Job Search and English Skills in “Put Your Skills to Work”

The Situation

Hispanics are Idaho's dominant and fastest growing minority population. A 1998 US Census report estimates 7% of Idahoans are Hispanic. Ada County, in SW Idaho, has the second largest number of Hispanics in the state. Many of these Hispanics are impoverished. The Census reports Hispanic median household income is 73% of the median for all races. Interviews with Hispanic leaders and a 14-person Hispanic Advisory Committee identified employment-related education as a critical need. Advisory members stated that Ada County had no job training programs for Spanish-speaking people.

Our Response

Marilyn Bischoff, Ada County Extension Educator and Linda Gossett, Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) Educator developed “Put Your Skills to Work”, a pilot employment program for low-income Hispanic people. A one-year \$30,000 grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation to the Ada County Extension Office funds the development, implementation and evaluation of three ten-week training modules of employment education and English language instruction. Directors Bischoff and

Gossett hired two Spanish speaking Hispanics to implement the program. Magdalena Soto, a teacher in Mexico and Idaho, is the Program Coordinator. Carmen Cuevas, an experienced child care worker, is the part time Child Care Supervisor. Two bilingual Hispanic teens assisted as child care aides.

Course content was adapted from two Cooperative Extension curricula designed for Welfare-to-Work programs: California's “Gateway to a Better Life”



Magdalena Soto instructs students in a “Put Your Skills to Work” class.

bilingual curriculum and Texas' “Moving Ahead Through the Maze of Change”. Materials to teach English were developed by Soto from books borrowed at local libraries. Soto recruited program participants from her existing (EFNEP) clientele and from Catholic worshippers who attended Spanish language mass. Two-hour classes were held on Tuesday and Thursday evenings from 7-9 PM. Each class included an opening activity, job search topics and English language vocabulary,

pronunciation, and practice. Five Anglo volunteers helped the Hispanic students improve their English. On-site child care was identified as necessary to insure Hispanic attendance. The directors located “Put Your Skills to Work” at a over Christian church in the Ada County community of Garden City. The church

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provided a child care facility and adult classroom. Attendance of children in the twice-weekly day care varied from 12 to 22 children. Children's ages ranged from six-months to eleven years.

A graduation celebration was held at the Ada County Extension office after the conclusion of the 10-week session. Two Hispanic Advisory Committee members distributed Certificates of Completion.

Achievements

Attendance for the first 10-week session ran from 8 to 24 Hispanic adults each night. Thirty percent were male. Participant's ages ranged from 21 to 41. Education levels varied from elementary school to university attendance. Four female participants hadn't worked. Of the enrollees who had or were working, wages ranged from \$5.50 to \$13/hour with an average of \$7.13. Worker's employment included: housekeeping, fast food, dietary aide, landscaping, construction and technician.

Ten students completed the program. They and their children attended the graduation. When asked what they'd learned through their attendance at "Put Your Skills to Work" participants responded: *"I learned how to fill out a job application, how important it is to read it first and how to look for a job according to my skills."* *"I learned what to do and what to say during a job interview."* They stated the program helped them: *"...to meet and interact with more people"; "The English words I learned help me in getting some idea of what my boss is telling me."* *"This program motivated me to continue learning the English language."* *"My children had a chance to socialize."* A male participant accompanied Soto to a Spanish language radio interview about "Put Your Skills to Work." When asked, *"What was the most difficult part of the program for you?"* he replied, *"To make a decision to start the course and finish it. My classmates and I feel we accomplished something. We gained confidence. Now we know how to fill out a job application. I want to thank all the people who made this program possible because it really helps our community."*

Lessons Learned/The Future

Participants were attentive in class and appreciative. They were fun to teach. Many needed individual help completing applications and writing a resume. Anglo volunteers assisted with some classes, but more one-on-one tutoring would increase program effectiveness. We learned to anticipate a high attrition rate. Two participants returned to Mexico. Others dropped out because the level of English was too difficult; they wanted to learn 'a,b,c's'. Several got evening jobs that prevented them from attending "Put Your Skills to Work". The pre- and post-course evaluations must be revised. Participants did not understand terms such as: *goal setting, aptitudes/skills, employee benefits* and that *employees have rights* and it's appropriate to *negotiate conflicts at work*. The second of three ten-week sessions has begun. Parts of the program are being revised. Bischoff and Gossett have learned much and expect that by the completion of the third ten-week session they will have helpful information to replicate similar projects in other locations.

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