



EPAL Episode 2.6

Total time: 32 min 40 seconds

Meg Foster 0:00

Thank you for listening to this short recording. I'm Meg Foster, Prevention Program Coordinator, at the Sexual Assault Task Force. In this series of SATF's Exploring Prevention Audio Library, we connect with people across Oregon to learn more about creative violence and abuse prevention ideas. Today we are joined by Alondra and Claire from El Programa Hispano Católico. In this episode we hear more about their culturally specific prevention programming. Let's start with introductions.

Claire Barrera 0:25

Hi Megan, I'm Claire Barrera and I'm Program Manager at El Programa Hispano.

Alondra Padilla 0:33

Hi Meg, I'm Alondra Padilla and I'm the Youth Prevention Education Coordinator for UNICA.

Meg Foster 0:41

Great! Thank you both so much for being here, both of you. Claire, do you mind starting off with a little bit more information about what El Programa Hispano Católico is and what your organization does?

Claire Barrera 0:55

Yeah, El Programa Hispano Católico is a culturally specific organization, by culturally specific that means we are specialized in working with the Latinx and indigenous Latin American communities. We're based in the Portland area but we work pretty broadly across three or four counties. Our organization serves a huge amount of people through a lot of different programs. For example, we have a program for elders. We have economic assistance programs for things like helping people sign up for food stamps, rent assistance, utility assistance, job training. We have a ton of youth services, school-based services to support youth. The program that Alondra and I work with is called Proyecto UNICA. Proyecto UNICA is a domestic and sexual violence and human trafficking program. We do a lot of intervention services, so we have a crisis line. We



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support survivors through case management, counseling, support groups, and we also have the amazing program that Alondra works in which is our sexual violence prevention program.

Alondra Padilla 2:12

What I do is teach the PAS curriculum, which is Prevención de la Agresión Sexual, sexual violence prevention. Our goal, or what we do with PAS is we develop the curriculum and make adjustments; we collaborate with community programs such as schools to implement the PAS curriculum with students and groups. We produce special prevention projects with youths. We also provide workshops and trainings for both professionals and parents. We also do community awareness and outreach events and activities. We teach several topics; it is a nine week curriculum. Some of those topics are: consent, gender and sexuality, power control and oppression, healthy relationships, media impact, bystander intervention, rights and consequences, drugs and alcohol, social change and activism. So what makes our program culturally specific, one, is that we are a bilingual program. So we use both English and Spanish. We do a lot of culturally specific activities within our curriculum. When I teach them we try to incorporate culturally specific activities. An example would be "LOTERIA," Loteria is a Mexican board game. We do that with the students and we try to bring food, when we are in person, culturally specific food such as pupusas, tamales, tacos, stuff like that that will help connect youth to their backgrounds.

Claire Barrera 4:20

Yeah, I think most people who do prevention work know that what we teach has to feel relevant to the people we teach it to. A lot of mainstream organizations might think of that in terms of age, you know it's important when you are teaching youth that the examples you give and the context feels relevant to the age group you are working with. So they might provide examples of things or projects that feel meaningful to the young people they are working with. So when we are thinking about making it relevant we really believe that teaching through culturally specific lenses makes it feel relevant to the young people we are working with. The other thing Alondra mentioned is all the ways we incorporate positive examples and connections to culture for the youth, the Latinx youth we work with. We believe that connecting anyone to their culture and strengthening their cultural connection is going to prevent violence. There is a lot of disconnect from culture that youth of color experience because of white supremacy and colonization. The youth we work with are often first and second generation immigrants. They have already experienced a schism in terms of culture. They may have a lot of connection to culture because of their family but they are also being expected to assimilate into dominant, white culture. And so that can cause a lot of pain and trauma and we believe that connecting them to their culture and particularly liberatory aspects of their culture that do not promote rape culture and violence, will help prevent violence in our communities. That's the philosophy behind why we do that. I think Alondra did a great job of talking about the ways we do that; we try to do that in all aspects through food, art projects, through language - you know culture is so

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expansive! We try to make sure we are incorporating culturally specific material and information in all those aspects.

Meg Foster 6:45

I know in the last several years in particular you all have really expanded some of those cultural based activities and you have done that a lot through art and actually connecting young people in the community. I am wondering if you might want to talk a little bit more about some of the art and some of the specific projects you all have worked on in the last several years or are currently working on.

Claire Barrera 7:16

I can talk a little about the history and then maybe Alondra can share about some of the upcoming and more recent stuff that we have done. Yes, a big aspect of our program is making sure we are supporting the youth in getting out in the community and we want them to feel - partly it's that we want them to feel like they have ownership of public space just as much as white youth or non-immigrant youth and people feel that they have ownership of public space. So that means pretty much every semester we take the youth who have completed our nine-week-curriculum on a field trip. We are also interested in connecting their learning to the real world. And of course we talk about the real world in our programs but we also want it to be an embodied experience. So we have taken the youth to the Portland Art Museum and helped them think about the role museums play in colonization and help also the museum understand the ways they are contributing to colonization when they take cultural artifacts and put them inside museum walls. They also went to the Oregon Historical Society a few years ago and learned about the history of racism in Portland and Oregon as a way to connect racial violence with sexual violence and communities liberating themselves. So those are some examples of how we use field trips. We have also taken youth to the beach because we want youth to feel like they have the right to be in natural spaces and a right to self-care and mental health and rest, which is so much less accessible to youth of color. Youth of color tend to be seen as older than their age and tend to have to take on responsibilities beyond their age at younger ages than their peers who are white. So giving the youth a chance to connect self-care and stress reduction to prevention has been really important as well. And then we've also had the opportunity to help youth connect to local artists to express their visions around ending sexual violence. For instance, we worked with muralist Rudolfo Serna who has worked a lot with folks in Portland, including incarcerated youth, to help them develop their viewpoints. So the youth created their vision around a world without violence, so that was one of the more recent activities we did. Alondra, what are some of the things that you all have done in the last year and that you have coming up?



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Alondra Padilla 10:02

Yeah! So there are actually two things. There was one project we planned but were unable to complete due to Covid. We planned out a “zine workshop” with a local artist here in Portland. Students were going to have the opportunity to produce their own zine, with the theme of prevention. And they wanted to reflect on the impact that violence has on our community. What the youth were going to be doing was learning the history of the zines so at first they were going to be brainstorming and working with the local artist. The second session they were going to learn more about zine history and they were going to take a field trip to the IPRC, which is the Independent Publishing Resource Center, where they were going to learn how zines are made to prepare to make their own. On the third session they were going to continue to work on their zines and share with the community. Like Claire mentioned, we thought it would be a good idea for the youth to feel like they have the right to have the space and be able to share what they have created with their friends, family, and the community.

Our second project that we are actually working on right now, we are working with an herbalist. So we are going to be doing a workshop in the next couple of weeks; we are doing it online due to Covid. The youth are going to create something called “Agua de Florida” which is going to be a stress relieving spray that they youth can use. The herbalist is going to come up with a list of plants and we are going to learn about the background of the plant and the benefits it has for the body. All together, with the youth, we will hand them the kits and everyone will be able to create the spray and feel more connected right now with everyone at home.

We will be working on a third project in the beginning of next year with a different artist. We will talk to the youth to see what they want to do; we think it is really important to get the youths’ feedback so they can feel more included in our planning.

Meg Foster 12:32

That is so cool! And I've always been so appreciative of the ways you all approach your prevention program as more than just a school based education model, which we see in a lot of places and can be really amazing but you all take it that step further and just really integrating prevention into the lives of all the people you work with. What led you to this approach, what was your process developing the PAS program as it exists today?

Claire Barrera 13:08

PAS has been around about 10 or 11 years now and originally the folks who started the program did a community assessment to see what are the needs of the community and what did the community want to see. And we also thought about, what are the ways - most of our staff, like Alondra and myself are bilingual



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and bicultural ourselves, so we are bringing our own lived experience and understanding of how things work best in our culture. What we realized is that prevention...I mean I think all liberatory work, including prevention, works best when you are in relationship. As human beings we need attachment, we need connection, we need community. We learn best when we are in relationships with others and when those relationships are meaningful. And so the model of the one-time school workshop didn't make sense to us. It became important to make sure we were working with the same youth over a period of time and that we were addressing all aspects of who they are. We also realized that there is a really difficult, there can be really difficult challenges created for youth who are being educated in a dominant culture system. They can have a bit of a break or conflict with parents who were educated in other countries in a very different educational system and with different values. We wanted to make sure we weren't causing strain between parents and youth. That is even more important because one of the only studies on sexual violence in Latinx communities shows that folks, second generation immigrants are at greater risk for sexual violence, and part of the understanding around that is that when second and third generation Latinos begin to acculturate they begin to lose some of those protective factors that culture provides. We did not want to be contributing to that by educating on some new ideas that maybe their parents weren't familiar with or perhaps wouldn't be completely comfortable with some of the things that we were sharing and it could cause issue of home, so another aspect of the model that I think is amazing and important is that we do work with the parents and caregivers as well, so that they have the same information the youth does as well. And that helps the parents gain trust and understand why we are talking about the stuff we talk about. And Alondra has been doing some great work with parents even during this remote time to enhance that. Alondra, I don't know if you want to share about that or add anything else about the model that we use and why we chose it?

Alondra Padilla 16:09

As Claire mentioned, yes I have been working with the parent and the youth during this remote time. We just feel like it's very important to work with the parents as well and get their input, and, as Claire said, inform them on what we are going to be teaching their youth. Also I love to take suggestions from the parents and help them feel more included. I feel like that puts them more at ease about the topics we are teaching them. So I try before each session that we have with the youth, like right now we are about to have a nine week session, we're going to have a parent meeting where all the families are together on Zoom. They can ask any questions; we can clarify anything and just make it very clear. I know a lot of the parents when they think of PAS they think we are teaching sex education and we just want to make it clear that that's not what we are doing. We answer any questions they have and take any suggestions; we are very open to any suggestions. We also use, as Claire mentioned, "Popular Education" with our teaching. It's an anti-oppressive way of learning and trauma informed. We feel like this is a very good way to get the youth to engage. So Popular Education is where everyone shares a knowledge, so not just the teacher. Everyone's knowledge is important. We take this approach because when you think about back in the day where you



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go into a classroom and the teacher is teaching and the students are just listening, we just feel like when everyone has an input students learn better than when just the instructor is teaching the whole time. So how we use Popular Education, we communicate objectives and expectations at the beginning of the group. So we set up a community agreement at the beginning of each session so we can all be on the same page. We also try, when we are in person, we try to sit in a circle to orient ourselves and all be face-to-face. It seems a more welcoming environment than everyone just facing the teacher. We also use the body, heart, and mind to learn. We do a lot of physical movement, when in person of course. We leave space to express opinions and thoughts and experiences. We also do a lot of group and partner activities rather than individual. I just feel like working as a group is so much more impactful than individual. You can get so many new ideas from other people! And we really enforce supporting one another in our learning.

Meg Foster 18:58

Thank you both so much! I feel like in some ways you all are describing an education model I am not used to, going through our mainstream system back in the day. It is obviously really informed by and led by the communities you are working with and within. I am so grateful for you to be talking about that. Knowing that a lot of people are not familiar with this model of Popular Education, and I really love what you just said Alondra about the heart, mind, and body being incorporated in education, using all of this approach and what you have learned so far, what successes have you experienced with your prevention program and this model of prevention programming you are using?

Alondra Padilla 20:00

I think my biggest success now, I just started in January so as soon as I was going to go into the classroom we all got sent home because of Covid. I think one of my biggest successes was just helping the youth and families transition from in-person to online. At first it was just super hectic because no one knew what they were doing! Not the schools or us, or the parents or the teachers, so I think one of the biggest successes was being able to help the families. There were a lot of families that didn't have the technology or the knowledge of the technology. I think being there to help the families and building that rapport, so now I feel like the parents like that we are teaching their students right now. I've gotten some really good feedback from the parents that their kids really enjoyed being taught the curriculum online, how they wish it was in person, and how even the parents were involved. The kids would teach the parents what we taught them. So I think building that rapport and building strong relationships with the families was super important for us. At the beginning a lot of the parents requested us to do a lot of mental health and self-care at the beginning because it was so hard for everyone to be stuck indoors for quarantine. So we did a lot of that and the parents were thankful we were there to help the youth at this difficult time. And the families as well, because we were able to financially help a little bit and get some supplies they needed. That was definitely one of the successes. I was also able to take our curriculum, which was originally a nine week

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curriculum, an hour and a half per session in person, and I had to transition that to 30 minute online sessions. Being able to do that within a few months, yeah, we were successful and got good feedback on that. I don't know if you have anything to add, Claire?

Claire Berrera 22:23

Historically, I would just say, a lot of the successes we see is that youth come back over and over. We teach the full nine weeks three times during the school year - fall, winter, and spring. And we very often see the same youth come back and take the whole series over again. And a lot of youth express to us that it's their safe space in the school as students of color. It's a place they can go and speak Spanglish and feel connected to themselves and their history and culture when the dominant school culture is not a welcoming place. That has been a big aspect of success that we see over and over.

Alondra Padilla 23:07

Yeah, I can add a little bit to that, Claire, how she mentioned youth come back: this is going to be the third session I'll be teaching online and a lot of the youth are taking the curriculum for the third time! Which I am really excited about. I can see why they are; we do a lot of fun activities, like I mentioned, the first two sessions were shortened, maybe 20 minutes, so I couldn't elaborate much. This third time around we are more comfortable working online and we have more time, so they are going to be an hour to hour and a half, so I will be able to go into more depth on each topic. I've spoken to the families last week and they are excited to have me back and so are the youth!

Meg Foster 23:55

That's really awesome! Everything you all just shared really speaks to the priority you put on relationships and the way you have been able to successfully transition and also just sustain meaningful prevention work generally and how built that is on relationships. Thanks so much for sharing that. Where are some of the places you struggled along the way? What lessons did you learn and adapt to? What made you think differently along the way?

Alondra Padilla 24:31

I think one of the biggest things that we struggled with, like I mentioned earlier, was the whole transitioning from in-person to online working. Just because, one, a lot of the activities we had for the curriculum were physical activities. For popular education we really like to do a lot of physical movement and it was really hard to take that away with Covid. That was one of the things we struggled with the most



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when I had to teach the curriculum. I had to find ways to change those activities from being physical to being online. One of the biggest things I mentioned was the technology issues and just getting the students to be involved at first. A lot of them were very shy; they didn't want to turn on their cameras. It made it hard to get them to participate. So we found ways to get participation, and try to make it more comfortable. We would try to do a lot of "popcorn style" and maybe if they didn't feel comfortable turning on their cameras as long as we heard them speak. We tried to do incentives as well - they liked that a lot - doing gift cards or they love food! So getting food delivered to their house if they participated or if they won a game for participating, stuff like that. That was definitely one of the biggest challenges. And then right now what we are facing is with one of the schools the biggest challenge right now would be recruitment for one of the schools. They just got a new youth advocate. Usually when we would do recruitment we would go to the schools over lunch or at an assembly and introduce ourselves but I think that might be a struggle right now with working online, trying to recruit youth. I feel like that is something we can overcome, but it is something right now that we are struggling with.

Claire Barrera 26:55

I think a larger struggle that I would love listeners to know about that is ongoing for us is the struggle to have schools and other institutions understand why prevention educators have advocate privilege and confidentiality. For folks who don't know what that is, in Oregon there are laws that protect advocates and survivors, so people who are certified, who have gone through a 40hr training and work for a domestic and sexual violence services organization can provide complete confidential and privileged services to survivors; we are not mandatory reporters, in fact we are legally required to keep the information survivors share with us confidential. And that is really there to protect survivors because what we know from lots of lived experience as advocates and from some research is that survivors are more likely to come forward and seek support when they know that the person they are speaking to can offer them that kind of privacy. Then they are more likely to get help and even more likely to eventually report it to the police, if that is what they desire to do. On the other hand, in our culture, we know that there is a huge desire for people who particularly hear children sharing stories of abuse to be obligated to report that abuse to the authorities. Our agency completely understands that and we also know that youth survivors aren't different from adult survivors in that they are more likely to come forward if they have a guarantee of privacy and get support. So that has been a challenge for us because when we work with schools sometimes the schools do not understand why advocate privilege and confidentiality is so helpful and so good for young survivors of violence. Sometimes they do not want us in their schools unless we agree to be mandatory reporters, which we believe we legally cannot be. That's been a huge stumbling block. It seems to have gotten better over time; more school districts are coming to understand that but there is still more education needed and a lot of legal support needed for agencies like ours who want to do prevention work and have to be able to offer that confidentiality and privilege to youth who come forward and share with us. The fact that we are bilingual and bicultural, the fact that we look like them, we speak the same languages

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as them, and the fact that we are trauma informed and spending time and building relationships with them makes them way more likely to share with us anything that is going on in their lives or in the lives of their family and friends. So, yeah, it's an ongoing challenge for us to help schools and other institutions understand that what we do is meaningful and effective and to have schools welcome us into their space.

Meg Foster 30:18

Thank you so much for sharing that, Claire. That is such a good point and this piece that domestic and sexual violence advocates are extensively trained and I know that you all at El Programa Hispano Católico do training above and beyond the state requirements. There's a lot of training and experience that goes into supporting the people that you serve and I think there is that additional piece that our systems were created with certain intentions in mind. And one of the things we have learned pretty noticeable in the last several years, and especially in 2020, is that our systems really at best are serving certain populations and those populations typically do not include communities of color, immigrants, refugees, and other communities that are impacted in unique and problematic ways by those systems. So all the more important that young people in particular have access to resources that are as you just said Claire, reflective of their identities and the communities they serve. I really appreciate you highlighting that. I know that the impact on the Latinx community and other communities of color, in particular, by having culturally specific prevention programming available to them and those additional services and communities that are afforded through that are so meaningful. And just how problematic those are when they are taken away. Thank you for sharing that, Claire.

Thank you both so much for your time today; I really appreciate you all sharing so much about your approach to prevention and just the meaningful impact you are having on, not just the communities you serve, but across our state. Thank you both so much.

Alondra Padilla

Thank you!

Claire Barrera

Thank you for having us.