

APPENDIX K

Status of Mexican Youth In New York City

While the Association receives cases of adults who are in need of service, adolescents need help as well. Of the 306,000 Mexican immigrants in New York City, approximately 50% are between the ages of 12-24. Most migrate to the United States as a result of the extreme poverty in Mexico and leave their families behind to provide for them. Hence, they live in a foreign country without any social support network in place.

The youngest of this group face greater difficulties in adjusting to their new situation. Without parents, there is nobody to support and guide them. Along with their loneliness is their frustration with their working conditions. Like adult workers they put in long hours, with little pay or time off. Though the youngsters would like to develop their talents, their work schedules make enrollment in traditional schools virtually impossible. Unfortunately, many have turned to gangs and substance abuse in order to find support in an environment where day to day survival is difficult.

Those who do not join gangs are also susceptible to substance abuse. Employers see the youngsters are exhausted from being overworked, and in some cases offer them cocaine to keep them alert. Soon after, the boys are hooked. Those who become dependent find it difficult to get off drugs. Unfortunately, treatment centers require some kind of documentation indicating legal residency. Because they are undocumented, they have no access to treatment and are unable to get off drugs.

Youth Development. We have made small, but significant steps in moving adolescents away from a violent life. During the summer of 1998 an anonymous donor provided funds for 21 adolescent boys to participate in a soccer summer camp. Some of the participants were involved in gangs. The program's goal was to show the youngsters alternatives to gang life by providing an arena to channel their energy. The boys also participated in workshops emphasizing leadership and conflict resolution skills. Moreover, the program provided funds for the boys to be employed as promoters of our main fundraising event, FERIA del Sol.

The Association initiated a pilot project a year ago when committee leaders in East Harlem noticed many youth were joining gangs. Presently, it is the only on-going effort to provide positive activities for them. As part of this pilot project, members of the staff of the Association and local committee leaders have developed positive relationships with gang members. In order to provide them with a safe environment, the leaders petitioned a local parish to open their basement. Every Friday since then, adolescents from the area play soccer and compete with one another.

In addition, this time is used for holding workshops on sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), the juvenile detention system, conflict resolution, and communication skills. The workshops are given when participants request on a given topic. The Association staff and local committee members run the workshop and provide counseling and intervene on their behalf if they have trouble with the authorities.

Source: Tepeyac Association Web Site (2002): (<http://www.tepeyac.org>)