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Abstract

This article describes the California TASH chapter's efforts to include Latino people at their recent conference. Twelve parents and caregivers attended. This was an outcome of a deliberate commitment to involve more people from different ethnic backgrounds in TASH events. The chairperson of the multicultural committee describes how the policy was incorporated into planning events. **Keywords: Cross Cultural**

LATINO PARENTS AND PRACTITIONERS WELCOMED AT CAL-TASH

By Elva Duran
Chair, Multicultural Committee

The California TASH Chapter Conference, recently held in Burbank at the end of April, was attended by more than a dozen Latino parents and care-providers from the Los Angeles area. The focus of this and future efforts will be to involve more and more people of color at various sessions of the yearly gathering.

As part of the CAL-TASH conference committee, I would like to share some of the steps undertaken by the committee and the Executive Board to actively involve the multicultural population for the first time in their conference, some of which may be helpful to other Chapters in trying to do the same.

- 1) First, a person of color who is part of the organization must work closely with other professionals of the conference committee to invite parents and other care-providers of color to the conference.
- 2) Secondly, this same designated individual should work closely with people of color. In California, as in Texas and Illinois, there is Fiesta Educativa. This is a grassroots effort of Latino families who have identified three or four days a year to present in Spanish and English information to parents and their family members who have disabilities. Speakers from all over California and other areas come to speak to the parents on a variety of topics. The parents hear the information in Spanish and English and thus help to educate other Latino families. This approach has been very successful. In California, the Fiesta Educativa executive director was contacted by the CAL-TASH representative and parents were identified who would benefit from the various conference sessions. The executive director and CAL-TASH, as part of their commitment to this endeavor, each made funds available for the parents to participate in the sessions and keynote speeches. Further, ties have now been established which will serve to assist in bringing more Latino families to future conferences.

- 3) Third, once the conference gets underway, the person of color designated as the representative needs to be there to greet and welcome the parents who will be coming to the conference for the first time. This is extremely important because the parents must be given support especially if they are not accustomed to the language and don't know the other attendees.
- 4) Further, the multicultural representative needs to help the parents understand what sessions are available by reviewing the conference program with them, and if possible, by accompanying them to some of the initial sessions. Many parents are unfamiliar with the hotel/conference atmosphere of an event taking place outside their home communities.
- 5) Introductions to other persons who are involved in the conference is also important — the parents and practitioners need to realize that there is a sincere effort from the Executive Board that they are welcomed to the conference.
- 6) If at all possible, at the beginning of the conference have some welcoming words in the native language so that the parents will feel they are truly a part of the organization.
- 7) If the parents are bilingual and understand some English, there will not be a need to arrange for translation. Most school districts, through their media departments, will let conference members use head-sets or headphones which can be plugged into equipment used for translating. Hotels are usually not equipped with this equipment, but it can be obtained locally if necessary through the hotel's media services. When possible, one or two of the conference sessions should be conducted in the native language of the parents and care-providers. By making this extra effort, the parents who are not bilingual can at least attend one session which they

are able to understand without the use of translating equipment. It is also a very good idea to sit down with the parents at the end of each conference day and talk with them about some of the sessions they have heard and have not understood completely. This will help them ask questions and will assist them in further understanding the information received. At CAL-TASH, the multicultural representative talked to the parents at the beginning and at the end of each day of the conference. Many of the parents commented that this helped them to better understand what they were listening to at each session.

Finally, it is important to have a commitment from the Executive Board of the organization that persons of color can become a participating segment of the sessions if everyone works together toward this common goal. Planning has to begin many months in advance and there must be a delegated representative who is committed to the organization and who is also willing to work closely with the other members to bring persons of color to the conference. By strategizing together, other people in the organization can slowly begin to be part of the effort and eventually more and more people of color will see they can be an important part of TASH activities.