

Focus Group with Seniors

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On October 6, 2008, I met with a group of nine (9) seniors at the Senior Center in Watsonville, California. All of them were Spanish-speaking women. The group was conducted in Spanish.

The women were eager to share their life experiences and their thoughts about prevention. They stated *“nosotras sabemos, pero ellos piensan que saben todo”*; they “know a lot”, even though they often feel dismissed by youth “who think they know everything”.

The women shared their thoughts about problems and risks that youth face nowadays. They spoke of youth driving recklessly driving, and taking the car while the parents were away at work. Several echoed in agreement. There was recently a car crash that involved a young driver, and this was fresh on their minds. There was much discussion about youth being “mal educados” and disrespectful. (Note: “mal educados” translates literally to “poorly educated”, but is correctly translated to meaning “ill mannered”.) In their opinion youth do not obey, do not respect their elders, do not greet you, and talk back. They also noted that there are problems with alcohol/drugs (“vicios”) and gangs. “Youth get together to do bad things”.

They talked about the problems that families face such as having little support among extended family members, and single women trying to raise their children. *“Cuando estan chicos los niños hacen caso a la familia, pero cuando estan grandes le hacen mas caso al ambiente social y a sus amigos.”* (“When children are little they listen to what their families have more say, but when the children are older they are more influenced by the social ambiance and their friends”.)

After discussion the problems, the women came up with the following suggested solutions:

- Offering financial support
- Counseling services at schools
- Having a class for teacher to teach youth manners
- Parent education
- Activities (music, sports, etc) so that youth can be involved in productive (rather than destructive) things
- Seniors can teach a manners class

An over riding theme from this group was the lack of “educación” (manners) and respect among the youth. One woman echoed the sentiment of the group by stating *“escuela no tuvimos, pero educación sí”*. (“We may not have had much schooling, but we were well mannered”.)

The group then focused on the needs of seniors. They noted the following concerns among seniors (in general, not just themselves): the lack of company, the need to be heard, the need for attention and affection, acknowledgement from doctors and store personnel, help with hygiene, help with personal care.

The group was eager to suggest solutions and services they would like to see:

- More funding to IHSS
- Counseling

- Activities and distractions
- A senior outreach program in Spanish (and not require the outreach volunteers to be bilingual).
- Transportation to go to North County, for drivers to give the senior time to eat their lunch before coming to take them back, and wished there were more convenient bus stops.
- Group therapy (in Spanish)

The women stated they enjoyed the focus group and were happy they were asked to share their opinions.