

Fresno Adult School

The Navigator Project: A Collaboration with Fresno Metro Ministries and Community Medical Centers of Fresno

When groups gather for the common good, great things can happen, and the Navigator Program at Fresno Adult School is an excellent example. The program was developed to train Fresno Adult School EL Civics/ESL students to become change agents in dispelling the myths and fears that the Hispanic community has of navigating the health care system. The program, which began April 2005 and culminates December 2005, uses the resources of Fresno Metro Ministries (a non profit), Community Medical Centers of Fresno (a large hospital network), and Fresno Adult School.

The Navigator Project, patterned after the chronic disease navigator programs which taught the terminally ill how to communicate with their doctors during stressful times, is unique in that it is 1) working with a small group of low-income, Spanish speaking parents, 2) training those parents to navigate through the safety net system at the Community Medical Centers, 3) engaging them in service delivery improvement efforts, and 4) deploying them as navigators into their respective communities to help others access services at the Community Medical Centers. Twelve ground rules, established with student input, were developed at the beginning of the class (such as treat each other with respect, be a good listener, share your experience, demonstrate confidentiality by not sharing the personal stories of others outside the group, attend all classes, and focus on solutions - not just problems.) Each student agreed to sign a contract and abide by the ground rules for the program. Attendance policies were developed, also with student input, and stipends, paid by Fresno Metro Ministries, were offered.

During the first phase, students listened to guest speakers during a working lunch, took tours of the Community Medical Centers and developed basic assertive and conflict resolution skills. The class introduced topics such as accessing culturally appropriate care, finding available financial programs and understanding a patient's rights and responsibilities. The next phase of the program trained students to present to others the information they had learned during the first months of class. In order to receive the final stipend, students complete the third and final phase by making at least two presentations to at least 15 people total. The culminating activity will be a December 2005 graduation ceremony when students will also receive the final stipend. As of fall 2005, ten of the original 12 students remain in the program. As a result of the program, one student was offered employment upon graduation from the program. Several students have already spoken at a Metro Ministries meeting sharing what they learned about accessing the health care system. Because of the positive publicity, new students are signing up for the next program scheduled to begin Fall 2005 at Fresno Adult School. Former participants will serve as mentors. It is the hope of all participating agencies that as a result of having completed the program, the students will be prepared to advocate for their own health care rights and will feel empowered to share their new found knowledge with others.