



The Latin American  
Legal Defense and  
Education Fund

# ~ Newsletter ~

December 2006

P.O. Box 80  
Princeton, NJ 08542

## LATINO REFORM YOUTH COUNCIL (LRYC)

LRYC was founded by Moses Santizo, a Princeton-raised child of Guatemalan immigrants, to create a supportive and self-affirming environment for Latino students enrolled in high-schools and colleges in our area. Research shows that Latino youths with a clear awareness of their identity, and knowledge about the history and culture of their countries of origin are more likely to succeed in the United States and face lower risks of ending up becoming part of the alarming statistics that reflect on our youth. LRYC is dedicated to the intellectual growth, cultural awareness and overall development of the Latino Youth in the U.S.

LRYC's goal is to bring together young people to discuss their collective heritage and develop a strong identity as both Latinos and Americans. Through retreats, various community programs, field-trips, dialogue, and mutual reinforcement, LRYC contributes to the social wellbeing and educational progress of the new Latino community. Approximately 25 young people are currently participating in this effort.

LALDEF has partnered with LRYC to accomplish some common goals in reaching out to our Latino Community. LALDEF recently sponsored its most recent Leadership Retreat held this past November at the Burlington Meeting House, in Burlington, NJ. 25 Students benefited from this successful event which offered sessions on topics like Latino Identity in the U.S., Immigration Reform, Professional Etiquette, and Conflict Resolution among others. Students have responded with positive feedback:

"The retreat was informative. I enjoyed learning about the different cultures that define Latinos and about the problems that trap us"

– **Luz Aquino**

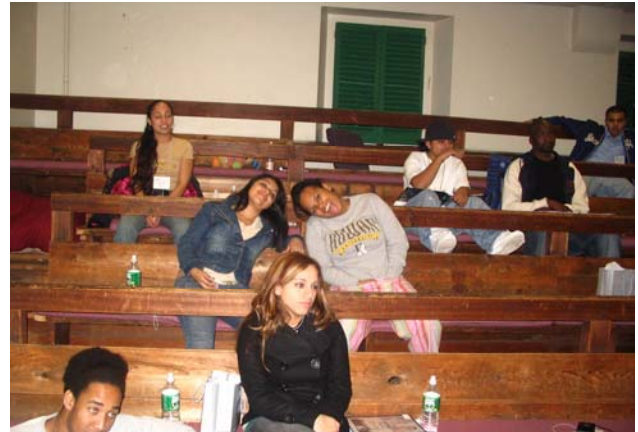
"These retreats are necessary because they prepare us to lead others into a better path"

– **Alejandra Segura**

"The Retreat helped me a lot and I thank LALDEF for the opportunity"

– **Alejandro Escobar**

LALDEF will continue to support LRYC's efforts by assisting and sponsoring the development of LRYC's future programs.



## U-VISA EDUCATIONAL CAMPAIGN BRINGS TOGETHER STUDENTS AND IMMIGRANTS

With the support of the Community Based Learning Initiative (CBLI – an endeavor that rewards students for their effort on behalf of grassroots organizations) a group of Princeton undergraduates, led by Laura Valle and Will Wallace, organized a door-to-door education program to notify non-citizens about the U-Visa program. The U-Visa program was started in October 2000 as a way to get the immigrant communities to collaborate with the authorities in the investigation of crimes. The program provides protection from deportation for three years to immigrants willing to denounce crimes and collaborate with the police in their investigation.

The door-to-door flyer handout also included the participation of members of the Latino Reform Youth Council (LRYC). On Sunday, December 10<sup>th</sup>, this lively group gathered outside a popular Princeton restaurant and then walked about the adjoining Witherspoon-Jackson neighborhood streets where many immigrants from Mexico and Guatemala reside. They visited churches, and civic organizations interacting with immigrants and alerting them about the U-Visa program. By joining forces, Princeton students and LRYC participants are providing invaluable services and partaking of a meaningful experience of benefit to all involved.

*More information on the "U" Visa process  
can be obtained by calling the  
LALDEF Helpline at (877) 452-5333.*



Founded in 2004

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[www.laldef.org](http://www.laldef.org)

*Helping People Get the Help They Need*

## BIENVENIDA PROGRAM

Bienvenida means welcome in Spanish. Last May, LALDEF inaugurated its Bienvenida Program whose purpose is to serve the growing Latino community in Central New Jersey. In partnership with Nassau Presbyterian Church, Bienvenida provides support to immigrants and their families in various stages of the journey towards citizenship by

- Supporting eligible immigrants through the naturalization process;
- Referring immigrants to qualified, reputable agencies and legal professionals on immigration and other matters;
- Translating documents, and educating immigrants about the completion of routine forms, applications, financial and commercial processes;
- Escorting, interpreting and advocating for immigrants in complying with civic duties, claiming services, or seeking redress as victims;
- Insuring due process and helping immigrants avoid recidivism;
- Advocating and mediating vis-à-vis businesses, landlords and employers; and
- Mentoring and advocating on behalf of students seeking to pursue post-secondary education.



The Bienvenida office operates on a limited basis on Saturdays between 10:00 am and 12:00 noon at Nassau Presbyterian Church in downtown Princeton.

## LALDEF Launches Immigrant Crime Victims Fund

As a means of strengthening the ability of law enforcement agencies to detect, investigate and prosecute crimes against immigrants, special visas were created in October 2000 as part of the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act. To qualify, an immigrant who has been a victim of certain types of criminal offenses such as rape, sexual assault, domestic violence, involuntary servitude, extortion, trafficking, and felonious assault, among others, must obtain certification from a law enforcement official as to his or her cooperation in the investigation of the crime. These visas grant the victim protection against deportation for up to three years, provide a work permit, and make her eligible to apply for permanent residency (obtain a green card).

Perpetrators of crimes against immigrants too often are not identified and go unpunished due to lack of witnesses and evidence, putting the larger community at risk. LALDEF has reached out to several police departments in Mercer County to offer to educate police officers about these visas, and encourage the adoption of a protocol for the selective use of visa certifications as a tool to build trust among immigrant communities and motivate victims of violent crimes to come forth.

LALDEF has also launched the Immigrant Crime Victims Fund to solicit and collect donations to help immigrants who are victims of crimes and can demonstrate both financial need and their inability to access normal legal and social services. The Crime Victims Fund will provide financial assistance with legal, medical and transportation expenses. The fund has already assisted two victims in Mercer County.

More information on the visa process for crime victims can be obtained by calling the LALDEF Helpline at (877) 452-5333. Donations can be made by check payable to LALDEF, indicating "Crime Victims Fund" in the memo field, and mailed to PO Box 80, Princeton NJ 08542.