

Theater as a Tool for Prevention



The Choice is Yours



National Coalition of Hispanic Health
and Human Services Organizations



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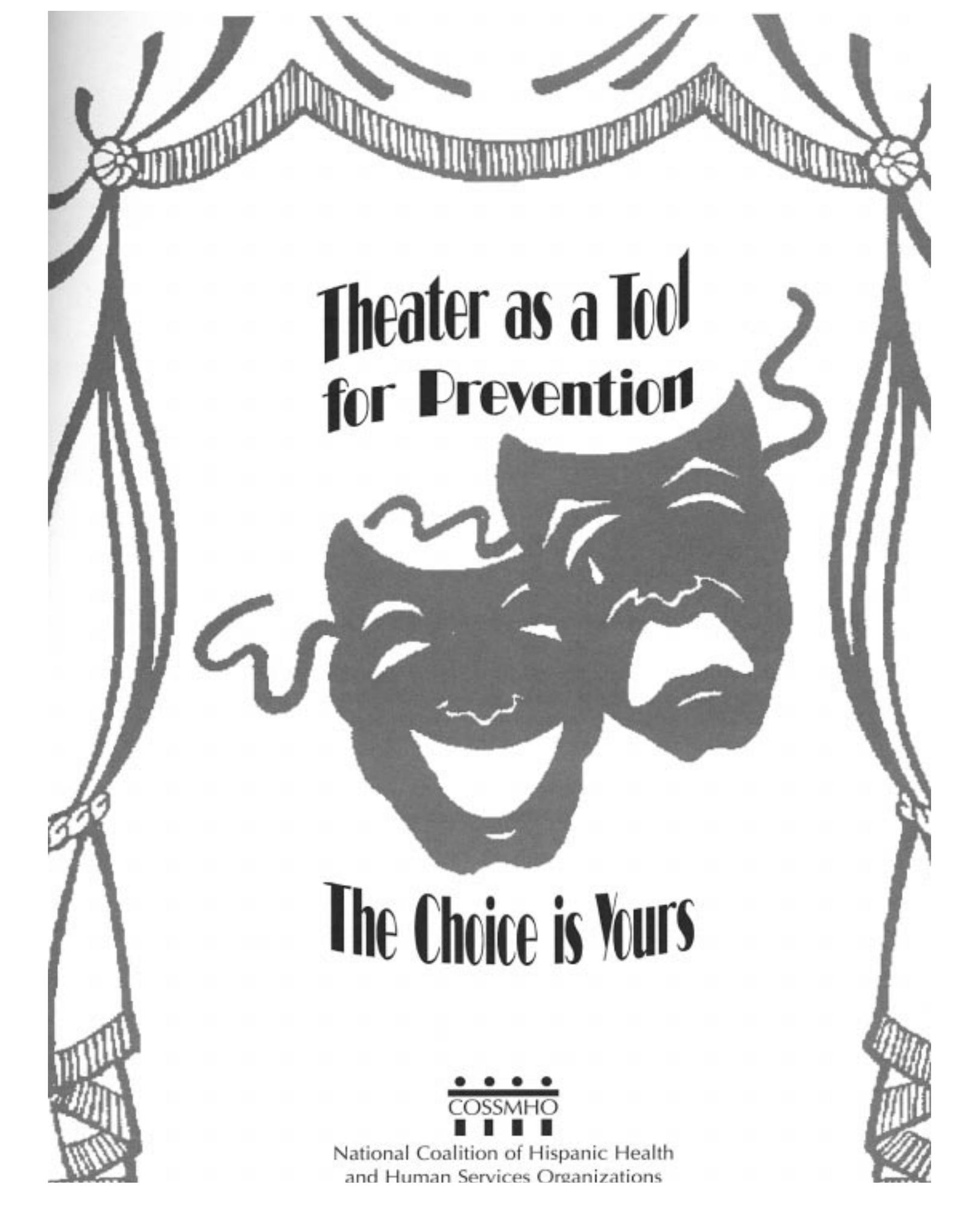
Mission: To improve the health and well-being of all Hispanic communities throughout the United States and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico.

Founded in 1973, COSSMHO is the sole organization focusing on the health, mental health, and human services needs of the diverse Hispanic communities. COSSMHO's membership has grown to more than 1,100 front line health and human services providers and organizations serving Hispanic communities.

COSSMHO fulfills its mission by working with community-based organizations; universities; federal, state, and local governments; foundations; and corporations. As the action forum for the Hispanic community, COSSMHO's services include:

- Consumer Education and Outreach
- Training Programs
- Technical Assistance
- Model Community-Based Programs
- Policy Analysis
- Research
- Advocacy
- Infrastructure Support and Development
- Development and Adaptation of Materials

COSSMHO is governed by a volunteer board of directors and managed by its President and Chief Executive Officer who oversees a staff of 35 professionals. COSSMHO derives its support from grants, contracts, corporate sponsorships, and membership fees. Consistent with its health related mission, COSSMHO does not accept funds from alcohol or tobacco companies or their subsidiaries. For additional information, please contact: COSSMHO; 1501 Sixteenth Street, NW; Washington D.C. 20036; (202) 387-5000.



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This how-to manual is dedicated to all the Hispanic youth who participated in these activities and whose commitment, artistic talents, energy, and creative spirit made this project special.

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For further information or to order copies, contact:

COSSMHO
1501 16th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20036
(202) 387-5000

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The *Alcohol and Other Substance Abuse Prevention Theater Project* was the first national demonstration effort to target the special needs of the diverse Hispanic communities in the United States and to tap Hispanic youth and their communities as a major source for prevention. This national demonstration initiative was funded in 1989 by the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP) for an initial 3-year period, which was later extended for an additional 6 months.

The Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP) is one of three Centers in the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), in the U.S. Public Health Service of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. CSAP provides national leadership in the Federal effort to prevent alcohol, tobacco, and other drug (ATOD) problems which have been linked to many other serious national problems: crime and violence, rising health care costs, school failure, HIV/AIDS, teen pregnancy, and low work productivity.

CSAP strives to connect people and resources to innovative ideas and strategies, encouraging efforts to reduce and eliminate substance abuse problems in the United States. Toward this end, CSAP supports and promotes the development of community, State, national, and international comprehensive prevention systems. CSAP's array of programs is tailored to specific cultures and locales and capitalizes on broad-based community involvement and partnerships among all sectors of society, as well as on enhanced public and professional knowledge of prevention.



The nationwide demonstration initiative was implemented in 12 community-based Hispanic agencies in the United States and Puerto Rico. The primary purpose of the project was to explore creative ways to communicate prevention messages to Hispanic youth and their families about issues related to the use and abuse of alcohol and other drugs (AOD).

Two important goals of the project were to establish the replicability of a primary prevention model that used community organization strategies and to explore the feasibility of using theater as an education tool for youth. It was envisioned that theater would give youth an opportunity to express themselves. Young people would be able to integrate cultural character into the script and performances, and at the same time learn and impart new information on the risks associated with AOD use.

The project was meant to develop and promote cultural identity through the arts and, more importantly, to give youth new information and skills for dealing effectively with their peers and environment with regard to these issues. In this respect, the project was seen as an opportunity to mobilize youth, community leaders, and other concerned individuals to address the pressing problems associated with the use of alcohol and other drugs.

The National Coalition of Hispanic Health and Human Services Organizations (COSSMHO) began experimenting with the concept of theater education in 1988,



when the Office for Substance Abuse Prevention (OSAP) funded *Compadrazgo: The Intergenerational Alcoholism Prevention Project*. This initial project was successfully launched in six Hispanic communities and reached more than 2,000 people in 1 year. *Compadrazgo* tested the effectiveness of teen theater as a tool for opening the channels of communication between adolescents and adults. The project was an ambitious multisite effort that focused on training youth in high-risk environments in prevention principles and developing theater presentations that were firmly rooted in a Hispanic cultural context. The culturally relevant presentation that resulted involved the creative use of language, traditions, and music.

In 1989, as the CSAP *Alcohol and Other Substance Abuse Prevention Theater Project* was being launched, COSSMHO received funding from the Office of Human Development Services, Administration for Children and Families, to implement the *Gangs and Drug Abuse Theater Prevention Project*. This 2-year project, which continued to build on the previous efforts, was designed to mobilize the entire community toward participating in a town meeting. It was in this town-meeting context that the youth theater performances took place and imparted their prevention messages. The town meeting also provided the ground for discussing the impact that the use of alcohol and other drugs has on the community and for giving the community the latest information about these issues.



The success of the *Alcohol and Other Substance Abuse Prevention Theater Project* was principally the result of the steadfast commitment, collaborative efforts, and creative energies of the 12 participating local agencies. Hispanic youth, under the guidance and leadership of local project and theater directors, were able to take the basic *teatro* model and infuse it with their unique cultural and linguistic character. COSSMHO wishes to extend special thanks and appreciation to the following agencies:

Avance Human Services

Los Angeles, CA

La Clínica Familiar La Fe

El Paso, TX

Centro de Amistad

Guadalupe, AZ

Latin American Youth Center

Washington, DC

Centro Mater

Miami, FL

Latino Family Services

Detroit, MI

Centro Sister Isolina Ferré

Ponce, PR

Puerto Rican Family Institute

New York, NY

Centro Sister Isolina Ferré

Caimito, PR

Radio Cadena KDNA

Granger, WA

Horizons of Mission Enterprises, Inc.

Mission, TX

Youth Development, Inc.

Albuquerque, NM



Framework

A. Specific Aims of the Project

The primary aim of the theater project is to create a culturally relevant and empowering prevention model for Hispanic youth and their families. It seeks to find different ways to communicate prevention messages on alcohol and other drug (AOD) use and abuse to Hispanic youth, their families, and the community at large. In conceptualizing methods of communication, it is important to understand the challenge of using innovative educational strategies to reach the unique characteristics of the Hispanic community. Thus the project attempts to integrate prevention messages within an appropriate cultural and linguistic context. The project is conceptualized around six specific aims:

1. **Learning the Facts.** It was important to ensure that Hispanic youth participating in the theater project learned the latest information about AOD use and abuse. A great deal of time was devoted to clarifying myths and misconceptions about alcohol and other drugs and to giving youth the latest information and materials about these topics.



2. **Learning the Skills.** Consistent with the notion that information alone is not enough, a focus was to provide youth with skills to better manage stress from the environment and pressure from their peers. Youth participants were trained in life-management skills, refusal skills, and other communication techniques.
3. **Learning From Personal Experiences.** The project was designed to provide Hispanic youth, their families, and the community at large with a performance that drew on the young people's experiences with alcohol and other drugs. Various components of the youth intervention and theatrical presentations incorporated exercises and vignettes that encouraged the youngsters to share personal experiences and to transform the stage and script into mirrorlike images of their home and community environments.
4. **Achieving Self-Expression Through Art.** The project was a wonderful vehicle to expose Hispanic youth to the dynamic and creative energy of the dramatic and performing arts. Youth received extensive drama instruction and were trained in voice and diction, script development, lighting, props, costume and stage design, music, and mime.



5. **Achieving Self-Expression Through Culture.** The project gave Hispanic youth an opportunity to integrate their music, language, and cultural traditions in prevention messages.

6. **Using Youth as Messengers.** The project was designed to transform participating youth into deliverers of a strong message against the use and abuse of alcohol and other drugs. In this respect, the young people's acting roles transcended the goal of providing entertaining drama to the community. The theatrical presentations were followed by a question-and-answer discussion facilitated by the youngsters and geared toward involving their families and other members of the audience in an open dialogue.

B. Script Development

The theater script has two important functions: to deliver a prevention message for the audience and to serve as a learning tool for the participants. A unique feature of this project is the expanded nature of the script development process. To ensure the acceptance of the script by both the participants and the audience, the script development must involve many individuals and groups, both national and local.



The development of the model script involved the participation of both project staff and a team of professional playwrights. The script underwent a series of revisions, changes, and adaptations to ensure that (1) the story was clinically accurate and (2) the factual information on alcohol and other drugs was presented in an appropriate and realistic manner. At the local level, each project site reviewed the script and made changes necessary to make the presentations relevant to its own audience. Thus the script was adapted for the different characteristics of the diverse Hispanic communities, which included representatives of the Mexican, Cuban, Puerto Rican, and Central and South American populations. Most important, the youngsters themselves revised the script and provided valuable information about the activities, vocabulary, and customs of targeted youth. This long process resulted in a bilingual, culturally relevant story about the impact of alcohol and other drugs on an individual and what this dependence does to friends, family, and community. It should be noted that this basic script has an even greater impact when communities adapt it and make it even more relevant and meaningful to their local audience. The model script addresses three basic themes:

1. *The dynamics of the family.* The script provides a story line that gives significant insight into family dynamics and the nature of the addictive personality. The script's intrafamilial relationships portray elements of enabling, denial, codependency, and acting-out behavior that characterize different stages in the development of AOD problems in the family.



2. *The importance of choices.* Throughout the story, the key characters are confronted with a variety of choices. The important message is that we are constantly making choices and are responsible for accepting the consequences of those choices.
3. *The role of professional counseling.* The story's conclusion promotes the idea that the family must seek professional help to heal and achieve long-term change. This conclusion leads the audience to realize that the problem belongs to the family as a whole.

C. Theater as a Tool for Prevention

Theater has long been an accepted vehicle for addressing historical or sociopolitical issues within the Hispanic community. The late sixties represent a particularly dynamic time during which theater groups were organized throughout the United States to address the life experiences of the Hispanic population. Scripts generally focused on the migrant experience of Hispanics and their encounter with a foreign culture. One of those theater groups, *Teatro Campesino*, was nationally recognized for its pioneer use of educational theater to create awareness of the political and economic concerns of the Hispanic migrant population. These initial efforts spawned many Spanish and bilingual theater companies throughout the United States and Puerto Rico.



The power of theater as a communication strategy results from its ability to appeal to more than one sense at a time. Theater provides the audience with the opportunity to receive and process a prevention message visually, aurally, and cognitively. Unlike more traditional educational efforts that present factual information in the form of pamphlets, classroom lectures, or videotapes, theater can present a more dramatically compelling message and can overcome the diverse literacy levels of an audience. In so doing, theater shortens the didactic distance between the messenger and the receiver of the prevention message.

Another advantage of theater as a method of communicating information is that it can promote awareness without resorting to confrontation or accusations. The success of a project such as this depends in large part on its ability to engage the attention of the targeted population. Social service providers can attest to the high level of denial they often encounter when working to prevent or treat AOD abuse. It is crucial to increase the targeted population's awareness of the high prevalence of abuse and its dangers to the individual, family, and community. The challenge is to convey the message without creating overwhelming anxiety in the target audience. For this reason, in a community that may already be suffering from multiple stressors, existing levels of denial must be taken into account to avoid adding a new concern.



A theater project has great potential to empower its participants. As an intervention strategy, theater masks the underlying purpose of preventing AOD use and abuse with the task of learning a script and a story line, as well as acting in front of an audience of peers, parents, and complete strangers. Role-playing exercises allow participating youth to deal with the issue without having to reveal their personal experiences with alcohol or substance abuse.

Theater as an intervention strategy requires high levels of engagement and commitment. A successful performance requires hours of dedication and concentration, which may not have been required in past school or family assignments.

D. The Training Component

A theater project has great potential for empowering the participants by transforming them into deliverers of anti-AOD messages. The comprehensive training component of the project contributes to the achievement of this aim. This project's developmental drama component includes a large body of techniques that are used both in preparation of theater presentations and as tools for personal and group development.



It may be helpful to invite key resource people from the community to discuss more technical or sophisticated subjects. For example, a representative from the police department or the juvenile court may be the best person to address legal issues regarding AOD use. The presence of such experts will not only help in the presentation of those difficult areas, but will also provide the participants with some insights on what others in the community are doing.

- **Theatrical techniques.** These are taught in hands-on sessions of technical training on how to effectively portray individuals affected by AOD problems. Although emphasis is given to developing acting skills, enacting situations similar to those experienced by youth at risk for AOD problems in their relations with friends, family, and peers reinforces the lessons learned and invites further discussion and exchange. Valuable techniques such as improvisation, role-playing, script analysis, and reenactment are taught. Basic performing skills such as voice projection, breathing techniques, posture, pronunciation, phrasing, and vocal range are also practiced.



- **Social activities.** At the end of each session, participants are encouraged to take part in a social activity such as watching a film, listening to music, sharing a meal, or even attending a local theater performance. These activities provide a nonthreatening atmosphere for the youngsters to relax and further strengthen the bonds among members of the theater group.

The developmental drama training sessions provide in-depth training on AOD issues, so it is important to ensure participation by providing transportation to the sessions, such as a qualified volunteer who can drive. A schedule for the developmental drama training sessions is outlined in Chapter IV.

This manual is a user-friendly guide to help professionals and community-based agencies as they attempt to work with youth and to establish youth theater interventions. The chapters that follow describe the basic ingredients and the important questions that need to be addressed as part of this endeavor. There are no right or wrong answers in this process. Every group or community will make valuable contributions to the outcome.



Staff and Volunteers

A. Staff

Staffing the project with the right people is the most important ingredient for its success. This project requires the following staff: (1) a project coordinator, primarily responsible for community contacts, youth recruitment efforts, and overall day-to-day management of project components, and (2) a part-time theater director.

1. Project Coordinator

The project coordinator is a key factor in the project's success since he or she is responsible for overseeing the implementation of the project's objectives and goals. Since this person must network in the community, especially with the school system and other service providers, the position requires an individual with extensive understanding of the community dynamics, as well as someone who is flexible, organized, and committed to empowering young people.

The project coordinator should have a college degree in the social sciences (or comparable experience) and/or at least 3 years of experience in a community agency setting. He or she should have good organizational skills and excellent interpersonal skills, especially for interfacing with community leaders.



Qualifications: The project coordinator should—

- Know the community.
- Be knowledgeable about the basic facts of AOD use and abuse, addiction, family dynamics, and so on.
- Be resourceful and able to tap into key systems (schools, media, clinics, churches).
- Be bilingual/bicultural.
- Have good writing skills.
- Be able to effectively juggle several activities at the same time.
- Be a self-starter.
- Be persevering and thorough.

Responsibilities: The project coordinator will be responsible for the following:

- Promoting the project through presentations at conferences, community meetings, schools, etc.
- Coordinating the promotion campaign.
- Tapping into key community resources and institutions through follow-up meetings with professionals in those institutions.
- Providing logistical support for theater performances.
- Coordinating youth recruitment efforts.
- Writing project reports and correspondence.



- Identifying possible funding sources.
- Coordinating all logistics for theater classes.
- Identifying a youth recruitment and retention strategy.
- Planning an intervention strategy that includes more than rehearsals.
- Planning the town meeting and making sure that experts in the field can participate in the event.
- Keeping case management files to document each youth's progress. (This is especially useful because experience shows that some of the participating youth may have issues of addiction and family abuse that need the expertise of a clinical psychologist or therapist.)
- Identifying the need for referrals to other professionals in cases in which a clinical assessment or a viable intervention is beyond the staff's reach.
- Planning and executing a budget.
- Handling the evaluation of the activity, if there is an evaluation component.
- Planning other workshops (to be held immediately after the performance or at other times) to address questions and concerns about AOD use.



2. Theater Director

The theater director is instrumental in establishing a youth training component and in getting youth engaged and interested in the training. This person will organize and facilitate a group of adolescents in high-risk environments in presenting a dramatic performance.

This position requires someone who is good with adolescents and shows them respect. Project coordinators and theater directors who model “good” behavior and respect can expect the same kind of behavior from young people. Some technical background in the performing arts or educational theater is also helpful. However, more important, the task requires an individual who is attuned to the special needs of Hispanic youth at high risk for AOD use and is willing to work with youth who have had no prior exposure to drama or to any group discipline. Beyond the ability to direct a superb theatrical presentation, this person must have the potential for inspiring the youngsters to be creative and free.

Qualifications: The theater director should—

- Be bilingual/bicultural.
- Be enthusiastic, and believe in the project and the training concepts.
- Have technical expertise and either amateur or professional theater experience.
- Be knowledgeable about AOD use and abuse.



Responsibilities: The theater director will be responsible for—

- Developing a rehearsal/performance calendar based on the recruitment strategies established by the project coordinator.
- Preparing background and presentation material for meetings.
- Preparing handout materials.
- Arranging for audiovisual needs.
- Planning special events for youth.
- Creating group bonding.
- Convening youth.
- Coordinating transportation.
- Coordinating rehearsals.
- Preparing youth for performances.
- Helping with the empowerment process of the youngsters.
- Acting as a role model: The daily contact and the hours that the theater director spends with the youngsters make it crucial that he or she be a good role model.



B. Volunteers

This project lends itself to getting support and expertise from others in the community who can work with the theater troupe on a volunteer basis. The project coordinator, with the assistance of the theater director, should identify special project needs and match them with the talent and energy in the community. Parents, grandparents, and other adults are a wonderful resource to engage in these volunteer efforts. Community volunteers can help with props, lighting, and make-up; costumes; music and dance instruction; fundraising; and ticket sales and promotion.



Youth Recruitment and Retention

A common concern in Hispanic communities is the lack of positive alternatives to alcohol and other drug (AOD) use for their youth. Logistical difficulties, such as transportation and financial constraints, as well as lack of self-esteem and familial support, often keep Hispanic youth from participating in traditional after-school events and clubs. This project made it clear that, given their proximity and service orientation, community-based agencies are generally better equipped to attract youth in high-risk environments.

A. Youth Recruitment

The most demanding yet rewarding challenge of this project is recruiting and retaining adolescents at risk for AOD problems. At the beginning, each site defined the age, ethnic composition, and size of the group it wanted to target for this project, and recruiting efforts varied accordingly. The following are some helpful tips to encourage youth to come to the first meeting. Experience shows that most will stay until the end and many will want to continue with some type of involvement with the project.

- A well-organized promotional campaign using radio, posters, flyers, public service announcements, and brochures might help. However, most such efforts will be fruitless if they are not followed up and reinforced by personal contacts.



- Any written announcement (letter of invitation, flyer, brochure) must be followed by a personal phone call or a one-on-one contact; otherwise no one will respond or show up.
- It is difficult to recruit youth groups through indiscriminate mass efforts. It is best to go where youth naturally gather—schools, churches, shopping malls, video-game arcades, and community centers.
- After the natural gathering places of the targeted youth are identified, the support of a key professional who works there will be needed. The support and assistance of a professional who is trusted and respected by the young people will be an important factor in attracting them to the program.
- The agency's own clientele can help in efforts to find youth who are interested in participating in a theater project.
- High school counselors and teachers can help in recruitment efforts. Apart from local high schools, English as a second language (ESL) classes and other activities involving youth should also be considered recruitment areas.



- The most effective recruiters are the youngsters themselves. Youth are most effective because they know the areas where other young people hang out, and they recruit very effectively by word of mouth.
- The day before the first meeting, staff members should make personal telephone calls to all the registered participants, to remind them of the meeting and to go over logistical details such as transportation. Participants should also be reminded that their presence is very important and that their personal contribution to the group matters.



B. Youth Retention

After the initial recruitment, it takes a very dedicated staff and a great deal of planning to keep the theater group together. Regardless of how committed the youngsters are to the success of the project, agencies often experience some “participant attrition” when working with youth at risk for AOD use, who may come from unstable living conditions. The following tips may help to counteract this situation:

- Specific details should be provided on the topics that will be taught in the developmental drama lessons. Before they make a commitment, youth will want to know the topic areas that will be covered in the course. The purpose and objective of the theater project should be clearly stated.
- In order to reach the greatest number of young people, especially those at high risk, it is important to offer a variety of time schedules. Afternoon and evening meetings are a must for youth who are attending school or working during the day, morning meetings are good for those who are not, and weekend meetings are always a good option.
- In communities where youth have limited English proficiency, it is important to offer meetings in Spanish, with bilingual and bicultural staff members who are more comfortable with Spanish.



- Staff at English-language meetings should have some bilingual and bicultural capability, in case the youngsters or the theater director need to use Spanish to get a point across or to work a point into the script.
- Meetings should be held in a place that is easily accessible by public transportation.
- In some communities, it may be necessary to set up a carpool or minivan run to offer youth viable transportation. Members of the staff might even offer to take youth to their next appointment or errand.
- The meeting place should be accessible and familiar to the youngsters. The classroom or meeting room itself should be warm and inviting.
- Group bonding exercises that take place apart from the rehearsals and performances should be an important part of the planned activities. For example, in one of the demonstration sites, a nutrition curriculum was incorporated into the intervention strategy. In an effort to teach the youngsters better eating habits, they were made responsible for cooking a meal once a week. They were divided into teams, each one responsible for some part of the meal-making process. As a team, they decided what to cook, and each individual was assigned to shop, clean, and cook different parts of the meal.



- The youngsters should receive positive learning experiences. In addition to rehearsals, they could meet on weekends to play a variety of sports. Sports are a very successful strategy for youth retention and group bonding. Young people enjoy playing together, especially that all-time Hispanic favorite, soccer.
- Academic issues and the educational achievements of the youngsters should not be forgotten. The program can be instrumental in supporting a successful school experience, for example, by implementing a tutorial program to help participants with their homework.

In efforts to retain youth, the following are helpful tips:

- Empowerment should be placed before acting and performing. The script should provide flexibility and encourage creativity.
- The project should provide an opportunity to nurture and mentor the participating youth.
- Availability of transportation should be ensured. Lack of transportation can pose a serious problem when most of the youngsters live far from the agency.
- Refreshments should always be offered.



C. Tips for the Theater Director

After the first meeting, the major thrust of the efforts should focus on keeping youth engaged and interested in coming back. Here are some helpful tips:

- The first meeting is the most important. It is during this meeting that the group rules are developed (punctuality, class participation, and confidentiality), the mood and climate are set, and the position and credibility of the group leader are established.
- It is important to enlist the active participation of youth in the development of the group rules. Participation is essential to helping all members to reach consensus and feel ownership of the group.
- The climate should always be warm, friendly, relaxed, respectful, and accepting. Youth should enjoy the meetings and look forward to attending them.
- It is important to always serve refreshments; this reinforces the warm and friendly climate. During the later group meetings, and depending on the financial situation of participants, youth might want to take turns bringing refreshments.



- The mood, in turn, should provide a more serious tone, one that assumes that youth are there to learn from the theater director and from one another, and that the tasks and purposes before them are of utmost importance to them and to their peers.
- As group leader, the theater director should be dynamic and stimulating, showing enthusiasm for the subject matter and making the concepts come alive for the youngsters.
- The theater director needs to strongly believe in the training concepts and in the purposes of the theater performance.
- The director's credibility with Hispanic youth is based on his or her (1) technical, professional expertise and knowledge of content topics, (2) personal and life experience, and, most important, (3) ability to listen and relate to their issues.
- A group of Hispanic youth will usually fluctuate in tone between the warmth of personal rapport and caring (*personalismo*) and the need for privacy and respect (*respeto*). These two concepts will be interwoven throughout the group process and interactions.



- The way the youngsters should address the director and, in turn, the way they want the director to address them should be determined at the start. If the meetings are conducted in Spanish, participants can be addressed in the familiar form *tú*. However, they may be more comfortable addressing the director in the formal *usted* form.
- In the group process, the needs of all participants should be considered, not just of those who can verbalize their needs or preferences. A more verbal and aggressive youth might tend to monopolize the group. If this is the case, that young person should be guided back to the business at hand, but always in a polite way.
- Literacy levels should be taken into account when reading scripts or when giving reading or writing assignments or exercises. Assistance should be provided without making the youngsters feel self-conscious.
- Problems of a sensitive and personal nature will always come out in a group like this, so it is important not to become engaged in a problem that is too serious for either the group or the director to handle. A private talk after class can be used to provide assistance or a referral to the appropriate sources for help.



- Sometimes the meetings may touch on some very private and personal subjects. The director, as leader, must never overstep boundaries unless the youngsters themselves have given their permission. Different people have different ways of establishing rapport. It might take some youth only one meeting to feel comfortable, while it might take others three times as long. This difference should be kept in mind when asking for volunteers to do a role play, etc., since adolescents are extremely sensitive about being put on the spot.
- Participants should be encouraged to offer comments and ask questions throughout the program. They can be invited to relate situations, problems, or solutions that are relevant to the topic. If one or more participants attempt to “run the show,” it may be necessary to politely cut off the discussion. By the same token, irrelevant discussions should also be redirected to the topic at hand.
- When participants speak, they should never be told that they are wrong. There is a very good chance that even when wrong, they are saying something of value. If their answer is not clear, they should be asked, “Please give some more information” or “Why do you think so?” The blackboard or newsprint can be used to write down every idea and give credit to the person by repeating his or her name: “María says that.... Can anyone think of any other ways to handle that type of situation, or do all of you agree?”



- Straight lectures tend to be boring and ineffective. For people's ideas to change, they must be involved both intellectually and emotionally. Therefore, this program should be carried out in the form of a discussion rather than a lecture.
- It is important to provide a nonthreatening learning experience. For example, if a vote or a choice of opinion is helpful, a show of hands can be requested of people who have encountered the situation that is being described or a problem that someone else in the class has experienced.
- Suggestions and opinions may be requested from the whole group, but generally only a few participants will speak up until they get to know one another. If one person brings up a personal problem, the other participants can be invited to offer suggestions on how to solve it.
- In order to have a better turnout for meetings, the director might have to personally call participants during the week to remind them of the next meeting.
- At the conclusion of the rehearsals, or before the opening, a pre-performance dinner can be offered at which certificates are presented, and perhaps a raffle is held. It can become a Family Night, and parents and other community leaders can be involved in the preparation and activities.



D. After the Performance

Experience shows that once youth have completed the training course, they become energized and fully committed to contributing to the project and to continuing in some capacity. For this reason, it is important to involve them in activities that go beyond the preparations for the performance and the performance itself, such as, for example, the community liaison group, interviews, or the town meeting planning (see Chapter VI). This is a wonderful human resource that should not be wasted or overlooked. Here are some helpful tips:

- An active, updated file should be kept on all of the participating young actors.
- The youngsters can become recruiters of other youth. They will be the best promoters of the program, and for this reason it is important to keep them involved.
- Youth should become involved in the community liaison group activities, in the media interviews, and especially in the town meeting. This is a wonderful opportunity for potential leaders to emerge, and it is therefore important to mentor them and make them feel that their contributions count.



- After 6 months or a year, a “class reunion”—with a dinner and a talk, a movie, etc., on a topic of interest to youth, for example—might provide an opportunity for further youth involvement and recruitment.



The Performance–Preparations

A. Developmental Drama Sessions (Sample Schedule)

WEEK # 1

INTRODUCTORY GAME

Positive Name Game

Participants sit in a circle. Each person introduces him/herself using his or her first name plus an adjective that starts with the same letter or sound as their first name (e.g., Witty William).

TOPICAL DISCUSSION

Objective: Exploratory session.

Subject Areas: Introduction of the group leader and the participants. The objectives of the program and theater performances are presented.

Individuals are encouraged to share expectations and interests with the group. The “rules of the game” (e.g., respect, confidentiality) are formulated by the group.

THEATRICAL TECHNIQUES

Exploration of what makes a good actor. Participants are introduced to the different expressions of the performing arts and basic elements in acting.



WEEK # 2

INTRODUCTORY GAME

Circle Gesture

Participants stand in a circle. Each person says: “I’m (name),” making at the same time a gesture that indicates something about him/herself or how he or she is feeling. The next person repeats it and introduces him/herself, and the activity continues around the circle.

TOPICAL DISCUSSION

Objective: Increase formative knowledge on impact of alcohol and other drugs.

Subject areas: Toxicology of alcohol and other drugs; presentation of the basic issues surrounding the problem of alcohol and other drug use. Terms such as “addiction,” “disease,” and “treatment” are defined. Discussion covers roles, enabling, denial, detachment, and recovery, and ends with an overview on the legal issues regarding alcohol and drug use.

THEATRICAL TECHNIQUES

Role-playing of individuals who have a problem with AOD as they interact with members of their family and community.



WEEK # 3

INTRODUCTORY GAME

“Yes” Game

Participants stand in a circle. The leader says, “Let’s touch the wall.” The group shouts, “Yes, let’s!” and runs to the wall. Leader says, “Let’s hop on one foot.” Group says, “Yes, let’s!” and so forth.

TOPICAL DISCUSSION

Objective: Gaining knowledge about the family unit and its members.

Subject Areas: Promote observation skills as the participants exchange information about their families and how they affect their own choices. Participants are invited to disclose information about family structure and atmosphere. Comparisons of the different styles of upbringing and transmission of culture will be encouraged.

THEATRICAL TECHNIQUES

Role-playing of members of different families.



WEEK # 4

INTRODUCTORY GAME

Person-to-Person

Participants stand face-to-face in pairs. Leader says: “Hand-to-head.” Pairs of participants put one hand to one head. Leader says: “Knee-to-elbow.” Each pair puts either knee to either elbow. The activity goes on until everyone is awkwardly connected. Then the leader calls: “Person-to-person!” and everyone changes partners. The person without a partner is the new leader.

TOPICAL DISCUSSION

Objective: Getting to know one another.

Subject Areas: Promotion of observational skills as participants talk about relationships and friendships. Exploration of inner feelings to gain intimacy and friendship. Analysis of intimacy, commitment, communication, dialogue, and emotions as they relate to trust, honesty, and responsibility. Examination of negative peer pressure, conflicts, and the role of positive peer support.

THEATRICAL TECHNIQUES

Identify and rehearse the dynamics of friends’ relationships in the script.



WEEK # 5

INTRODUCTORY GAME

Tangle

Everyone stands bunched together, hands in the air. On the signal, everyone grabs two hands of different people. When everything is set, the group tries to untangle without letting go and without hurting anyone.

TOPICAL DISCUSSION

Objective: Studying what we are and where we come from.

Subject Areas: Promote observational skills as participants discuss their community and culture or heritage. Participants explore issues regarding ethnicity, language, and city neighborhood configuration in the United States. They also discuss other forms of prejudice, racism, and reverse racism in our communities.

THEATRICAL TECHNIQUES

Identify and rehearse elements in the script as they pertain to the Hispanic culture.



WEEK # 6

INTRODUCTORY GAME

That's ME!

Group leader calls an adjective or state of mind, and any person who can identify with it shouts, "That's me!"

TOPICAL DISCUSSION

Objective: Getting to know who we are (self-discovery).

Subject Area: This session should be designed to help participants understand themselves, gain confidence, and establish goals based on interests, abilities, and values. The group explores the meaning of positive self-concept or self-image and examines the factors that determine the individual's self-concept.

THEATRICAL TECHNIQUES

Mime human expressions and emotions.



WEEK # 7

INTRODUCTORY GAME

Electricity

Participants stand in a circle, holding hands. Leader passes a squeeze to the left, trying to pass it around the circle as fast as possible. (“Try with eyes closed.” “Try the opposite direction.” “Try both.”)

TOPICAL DISCUSSION

Objective: Identifying emotions and feelings.

Subject Areas: Participants learn to identify positive and negative emotions. Emphasis is placed on learning to express feelings more accurately in order to communicate better with others. Identify, explore, and use constructive management of emotions that are common among adolescents.

Participants discover ways of managing appropriate responses to feelings and avoiding self-destructive behavior.

THEATRICAL TECHNIQUES

Mime human expressions and emotions.



WEEK # 8

INTRODUCTORY GAME

Charades

The leader selects a topic or name and tries to communicate it to the group without using any words or sounds. The person who guesses first becomes the new leader.

TOPICAL DISCUSSION

Objective: Developing communication skills.

Subject Areas: Examination of the meaning of dialogue—verbal and nonverbal—including cultural factors involved in the process of dialogue and the role of language in human behavior. Review of the many ways of developing better communication skills and of actual interpersonal situations dealing with perception, trust, relationship, and barriers to communication.



THEATRICAL TECHNIQUES

Identify and rehearse interpersonal exchanges in the script.

B. On Stage

The following tips can be helpful when working on the play itself:

Setting the Pace. Setting the pace from the very opening scene and using music to make transition from scene to scene will establish and keep the pacing and the overall rhythm of the presentation. Since rap music is a favorite of many young people in Hispanic communities, using rap during the presentation may help to create breaks in the action to talk to the audience through music. The closing rap developed by the Theater Group in Washington, DC, may be used to allow the members of the cast to express their own feelings about what was presented in the play and to leave the audience with an upbeat message.

The Use of Props. The set and props are secondary to the actual story. The scenes can be performed in open spaces or on a platform if it is available; the use of traditional scenery is unnecessary. A simple table can be brought on and off the stage area when needed, and if turned over it can become the television set for the next scene. Basically, the simplest elements work best.



The Wardrobe. This aspect of the play can be left open to interpretation by the group. Since the story is contemporary, the presentation can be done in everyday street clothes. If there are particular images that are relative to their community, the groups may incorporate them into the story.



Play Script (English and Spanish) and Final Rap

A. *The Choice Is Yours* (English Version)

1. Descriptions of Characters

MRS. ORTEGA She was left a widow with two children, Héctor and Fernando, several years ago. She has coped with her late husband's alcohol abuse by facilitating his addiction, ignoring his spending habits, and forgiving his failure to keep a steady job. In her codependent role, Mrs. Ortega failed to protect her family, especially her older son Héctor, from her husband. After her husband's death, faced with a broken home and no means of supporting herself and her children, she began working as a cleaning woman. Although Mrs. Ortega had been celibate since then, she has recently started dating a younger man, Rafael. She feels flattered by the sudden interest of a younger man and attracted by his authoritarian ways, which remind her of her late husband. This new codependent relationship is a symptom of the deep psychological problems that Mrs. Ortega still needs to face and heal.



- HÉCTOR** He is Fernando's older brother. Feeling that he had taken enough physical and emotional abuse from his father, Héctor dropped out of high school and eventually eloped with his high-school sweetheart, Sandra. Héctor is a responsible and caring person who has always kept in touch with his mother and younger brother. However, he's angry over all the opportunities he missed as a youngster and because his failure to break with his troubled past is presently jeopardizing his relationship with Sandra.
- SANDRA** She is Héctor's wife. Very young and insecure, she argues with Héctor often, especially since the birth of their first child. She tries to encourage her husband to get a better job or complete his education, but too often he is called to mediate in the frequent crises at the Ortega's home.
- FERNANDO** A bright and popular young man, he is involved in alcohol and other drug use. His father died when he was 10 years old, but he still remembers growing up in a house filled with violence. To gain attention, he learned to manipulate people, especially his mother, and has become very deft at getting almost anything he wants. Being the baseball team's star and being Carlos' friend are his greatest sources of pride and joy. He is very attracted to Sylvia, his girlfriend.



SYLVIA She is Fernando's girlfriend and a very responsible youngster. She likes Fernando but refuses to accept his womanizing or his addictive behavior. She becomes the first female in Fernando's life who has not fallen prey to his manipulative style. When she realizes that he is not sincere about changing his behavior, she breaks up with him.

CARLOS He is Fernando's best friend and confidant. He is also a member of the baseball team and has become a positive role model for Fernando. Carlos refuses to use alcohol or other drugs. It is Carlos with whom Fernando seeks consolation when Sylvia breaks up with him. Carlos becomes the direct victim of Fernando's abuse of alcohol and other drugs.

RAFAEL He is Mrs. Ortega's boyfriend. With his mood swings and dominant personality, he resembles the late Mr. Ortega, and like him also exhibits an alcohol abuse problem. Although he does not live in their home, he attempts to control the Ortegas' lives. He resents Héctor and Fernando and now poses a new problem at home.

MRS. PÉREZ School counselor.



LT. ESPINOZA Police officer.

GÓMEZ and **GONZÁLEZ** Two of Fernando's baseball teammates.

COACH Baseball team coach.



2. Play Script

SCENE ONE

THE DRAMA BEGINS WITH THE MOTHER AND OLDER BROTHER HÉCTOR STANDING AT OPPOSITE ENDS OF THE STAGE. BOTH OF THEM ARE HOLDING THE "RECEIVER" END OF A TELEPHONE TO THEIR EARS. THEY ARE TALKING ABOUT FERNANDO.

MOTHER Hello, *hijo*. I'm sorry to have to be calling you so late, but I really felt it was important to talk to you ...

HÉCTOR What is it, *mamá*? What's wrong?

MOTHER It's about your brother.

HÉCTOR That figures. You never call just to ask about me and my family. It always has to be about Fernando. So, what's the kid doing now?

MOTHER That's not true, Héctor. You know I care about what happens to you, too. But last night your brother came home very, very late again. He had been drinking. And I found a small bag of



marijuana in his room. The police have already brought him home twice and warned me about picking him up again. Things are just getting worse, Héctor.

HÉCTOR So what do you want me to do, *mamá*? He's probably just doing the same thing every high school kid does.

MOTHER But this is not right! You know what I had to go through with your father. His drinking turned him into a monster and had us all living in fear, don't you remember? Now your brother is drinking and using drugs too. I can't go through that again!

HÉCTOR Maybe I should just go down there and kick his butt all over the streets!

MOTHER No, Héctor. That won't help anything.

HÉCTOR Why not? That's what *papá* used to do to me, and you never did anything to stop him from beating me.

MOTHER But you ran away, remember? I can't let this go on. It has to stop ... (PAUSE) Please, *hijo*, can you come to a meeting with me at his school? Maybe if we talk together with his counselor ...



- HÉCTOR** I don't know if I can make it, *mamá*. If you really need someone to go with you, why don't you take your boyfriend Rafael with you? (*SARCASTICALLY, AND HOLDING BACK HIS TRUE ANGER.*)
- MOTHER** (*SOUNDING DESPERATE*) This doesn't involve him. Please, Héctor, I need your help!
- HÉCTOR** Sandra needs me too. The baby's only a couple of weeks old. I just can't leave every time that *mocosó* gets into trouble ...
- MOTHER** *Por favor, Héctor, do this for me!*
- HÉCTOR** (*PAUSE*) I'll talk to Sandra and we'll see if I can work something out.
- MOTHER** So, you'll come?
- HÉCTOR** I'll try, *mamá*. That's all I can do.
- MOTHER** Okay, son. I'll be there at three o'clock. *Buenas noches.*



THEY HANG UP THE PHONE ON BOTH SIDES. HÉCTOR FREEZES IN HIS POSITION. OFFSTAGE, WE HEAR RAFAEL CALLING THE MOTHER. HE COMES INTO THE SCENE ON HER SIDE OF THE STAGE. ALTHOUGH HE IS NOT STAGGERING DRUNK, IT IS CLEAR THAT HE HAS BEEN DRINKING.

RAFAEL *(ALMOST YELLING) ¿Dónde estás? I'm not gonna wait for you anymore ... (HE NOTICES SHE IS DEPRESSED.) Now, what it is it? Don't tell me you're gonna sit around llorando all night about that punk kid of yours. (PAUSE) Bueno, está bien. If you don't want to go, I can find me somebody else real easy. (HE STARTS TO GO OUT.)*

MOTHER *No, wait; don't leave. Look: I'm okay. I'll be good, I promise. Let me just comb my hair and we can go wherever you want.*

THEY EXIT. HÉCTOR IS LEFT ALONE ON THE STAGE. HE RESUMES HIS MOVEMENT, THINKING AND REMEMBERING HIS OWN HIGH SCHOOL DAYS. AN AUDIO TAPE IS HEARD FROM OFFSTAGE, REPRESENTING HIS MEMORY OF HOME.

VOICE (TAPE) *(THE VOICE OF AN OLDER MAN IS HEARD. HE SOUNDS DRUNK.) Héctor ... Héctor! Who the hell gave you permiso to go anywhere?!*



HÉCTOR'S VOICE *Papá, I was out with my friends. It's not late. Mamá knew where I was.*

VOICE Shut up, *desgraciado!* I'll teach you to have some respect!
¡Malcriado!

HÉCTOR Leave me alone, *papá*; don't hit me! Leave me alone!

MOTHER'S VOICE *¡Déjalo, hombre! ¡No le pegues! ¡Estás borracho, déjalo!*
Stop it!!

VOICE *¡Nadie me va gritar en mi casa! ¡Quítate!*

MOTHER'S VOICE *¡Déjalo! ¡NO! ¡No, no, no! (VOICE TRAILS OFF.)*

HÉCTOR STANDS STARING OUT AT THE AUDIENCE. SANDRA ENTERS, HOLDING THE BABY WRAPPED IN BLANKETS.

SANDRA What's wrong, Héctor? You look like you've seen a ghost.
Who was that on the phone?



HÉCTOR *(PENSIVE)* ... It was my mother calling ... *(HE SOUNDS VERY TROUBLED BY HIS OWN THOUGHTS.)* She wants me to meet her at my brother's school tomorrow. He's in some sort of trouble.

SANDRA What about the baby's two-week check-up? I can't go alone. Doesn't your mother understand that you have your own family now? She calls you all the time, expecting you to run over there. That's not right. It's not fair, Héctor!

HÉCTOR What do you expect me to do, turn my back on them? She doesn't have anyone else to help her. She needs me.

SANDRA Yeah ... Well, so do I. I'm tired of the way she always calls you as if you were Fernando's father. "Héctor, I need this. Héctor, I need that!" I wish you would think about what I need before you just say "yes" to her!

SHE EXITS; LIGHTS OUT, OR HÉCTOR EXITS IN SILENCE.

**SCENE TWO**

PARTY SCENE WITH LOUD MUSIC. SEVERAL ACTORS, SOME OF THEM WEARING TEAM BASEBALL CAPS, TAKE THEIR PLACES, CREATING A TABLEAU IN A HALF-CIRCLE FACING THE AUDIENCE. SEVERAL OF THEM ARE HOLDING OVERSIZED BEER CANS AND JOINTS IN THEIR HANDS, AND APPEAR FROZEN IN POSITIONS THAT SHOW THEM DRINKING AND SMOKING. THEY UNFREEZE ALL AT THE SAME TIME AS FERNANDO COMES INTO THE CIRCLE. THEY PASS THE JOINT AROUND AS THEY CHANT HIS NAME OUT LOUD. HE MIMICS "DOWNING" THE BEER AND SMOKING THE JOINT TO THE BEAT OF THEIR CHANTS.

THE MUSIC STOPS ABRUPTLY AS SOMEONE YELLS OUT: "COOL IT! IT'S A TEACHER!" THEY ALL RUN AWAY IN DIFFERENT DIRECTIONS. FERNANDO IS LEFT ALONE ON THE STAGE, DRUNK AND LAUGHING!

FERNANDO Whew! Somebody pass the *pisto*!! (LAUGHING) ¡¡Yo soy el rey del béisbol!! (TAKES A BATTING STANCE.) C'mon, man, give me one right over the plate! I can hit anything you can throw!! (HE STAGGERS AND SWINGS. AS HE MIMES THE ACTION, HE FALLS TO THE GROUND, DIZZY AND SICK TO HIS STOMACH. COUNSELOR WATCHES AND APPROACHES AFTER THE OTHERS HAVE LEFT.)



COUNSELOR I can see how your friends care about you; they all run off and leave you here. This could get you kicked out of school. Don't you care about that?

FERNANDO Maybe I do and maybe I don't. So you gonna bust me, or what?

COUNSELOR I could do that, Fernando. Then you'd be in more trouble than you think. But I'm going to give you a chance to deal with this problem. You be in my office tomorrow at three. After that, no more *quebradas*.

FERNANDO Yeah, yeah. I'll be there.

THE COUNSELOR EXITS.

FERNANDO Three o'clock? (*FRUSTRATED AND ANGRY, HE YELLS AT HER.*) I got practice at three o'clock!

CARLOS ENTERS.

CARLOS Hey, what happened, man? The guys said you got busted.



FERNANDO *(STILL SOMEWHAT HIGH FROM THE BOOZE, HE PUTS ON AN ACT.)* Hey, Carlitos, my “numba one homie!” Me, busted? Who said that? I’m Fernando, “the man with the golden arm,” remember?

CARLOS You’re bombed again, Fernando. What’s wrong with you, man? Why are you doing this to yourself? You’ll never make it to practice like this. C’mon, let’s get you into the gym. Maybe if I throw you into the shower you’ll sober up.

FERNANDO The shower? In the middle of the week? I only take a shower the second Tuesday of every month ... *(LAUGHS LOUDLY.)*

CARLOS Quit screwing around, Fernando. This could get us kicked out of school!

FERNANDO DROPS TO ONE KNEE.

FERNANDO So what, Carlitos? Then we’d have more time to chase down the beautiful babes all over town.

SYLVIA ENTERS FROM THE RIGHT.



SYLVIA Is that right? In your condition, you couldn't *crawl* anywhere even if you wanted to.

CARLOS Hi, Sylvia! Fernando's just messing around.

SYLVIA Yeah, sure. Look, Carlos, I want to talk to Fernando alone, if that's okay.

FERNANDO *(TRYING TO BE FUNNY)* Now, don't be jealous, Carlitos. She can't help it if she *wants* me, homes.

CARLOS You're crazy, Nando. I'll see you later.

HE EXITS.

SYLVIA Fernando, I asked Carlos to go because I didn't want to embarrass you in front of him. I just wanted to give you back your ring and your jacket. *(SHE GIVES A RING AND A JACKET TO HIM.)*

FERNANDO Why? ... Oh, babe! Me and Carlos were just joking about picking up other girls.



SYLVIA No, Fernando. You don't seem to see what's happening to you. I'm not impressed that you can outdrink every other guy on the baseball team. You think that by drinking and getting loaded people respect you, but they don't, Fernando. You don't have any respect for yourself.

FERNANDO What are you talking about?

SYLVIA I'm talking about you, about how you've lost control of yourself. You don't seem to care if you get kicked out of school. You can't see past the next party. Everybody's laughing at you, Fernando. They're taking bets that you'll end up like your father.

FERNANDO (*VERY DEFENSIVE*) That's bull! Nobody knows anything about my father! ... (*CALMER*) Besides, who cares about what they say? I don't need any of them!

SYLVIA Yeah, sure. You don't need anyone, not even me.

FERNANDO I didn't say that ... Look, Sylvia, just gimme a break. You know how I feel about you. Don't hurt me this way.



SYLVIA

Fernando, I care a lot about you too. We've been going steady since junior high school, but I can't just go along with this anymore. I'm sorry ... I wish you would listen to me, stop drinking, and get your life together. I'm not trying to hurt you ...

FERNANDO GETS ANGRY AND INTERRUPTS HER BEFORE SHE CAN FINISH TALKING.

FERNANDO

All right!! Forget it, then! I don't want to hear it from you or anybody else! Just forget it!!

FERNANDO STOMPS OUT ANGRILY. SYLVIA WALKS AWAY SLOWLY. SHE EXITS.



SCENE THREE

NEXT DAY IN THE COUNSELOR'S OFFICE, FOUR CHAIRS ARE PLACED FACING THE AUDIENCE. MRS. ORTEGA, HÉCTOR, AND COUNSELOR ENTER.

COUNSELOR Please, sit down, Mrs. Ortega. You too, Héctor.

HÉCTOR I hope he shows up. Maybe I ought to go look for him on the school grounds?

MOTHER *Déjalo que llegue solo.* He has to want to get out of this trouble, or else none of this will do any good.

COUNSELOR That's very true, Mrs. Ortega. The important thing is that Fernando should know that people are willing to help him.

MOTHER My son's father died an alcoholic a few years ago, Mrs. Pérez. Often he would get so drunk that he would just hit anything that moved. We suffered a lot while that man was alive. After going through all of that, I just don't understand why Fernando started drinking too.



COUNSELOR Mrs. Ortega, a family that lives day-in and day-out with an alcoholic can be left with deep scars long after the drinking parent is out of the picture. Many times the survivors have to deal with problems related to the abuse for a long time.

MOTHER God knows my life has not been easy. I know there were many times I should have done something to stop him from hurting us, but I never knew what to do, I never knew how to stop it. *(SHE CRIES QUIETLY. HÉCTOR PUTS HIS ARM AROUND HER.)*

ENTER FERNANDO. HE LOOKS MESSY AND BURNED-OUT. HE NOTICES HIS MOTHER AND ESPECIALLY HIS BROTHER.

FERNANDO *(TO HIS BROTHER, IN A SARCASTIC TONE OF VOICE.)*
What are *you* doing here?

HÉCTOR *Mamá* and I came to talk with you and your counselor about this problem you're having.

FERNANDO What problem? Everybody's making a big deal out of nothing.



MOTHER Fernando, your school counselor sent me letters, *hijo*. The police have had to bring you home more than once. *¿Qué te pasa, hijo?* Why are you drinking and doing all these crazy things?

FERNANDO I'm not doing anything to anyone!

HÉCTOR Do you think being picked up by the cops drunk and loaded is nothing?

FERNANDO Big deal! I party with my friends, so what? You know her young boyfriend, Rafael, drinks like fish! How come that doesn't bother her?

HÉCTOR Look, Nando, I don't like that guy either, and rather than have to see him around *mamá*, I stay away too. But you're still a kid, Fernando. Running around in the streets is just going to get you into some bad trouble.

FERNANDO Do you think I like to be around? Whenever that slob shows up, he acts like it's his house and he yells at her and tells her what to do! It was bad enough when *papá* used to push her around, but this guy is a nobody! I hate the way he comes in and tries to take over.



- MOTHER** Fernando, Rafael doesn't mean any harm. He treats me okay. But still that's no reason for you to be drinking. Don't you know it hurts me to see you do this?
- FERNANDO** What about the things that hurt *me*? When I need you, you're always too tired from work or he's coming over. Héctor's too damn busy with his "new wife." So, what's the big deal if I do something on my own?
- MOTHER** Fernando, we tell you these things because we care about you. You don't understand that all this could ruin your life.
- FERNANDO** No, *mamá*, you don't understand *me*. Whenever I'm with my buddies, they treat me with respect. When I pitch a no-hitter game it feels real good because everybody knows I did something good! After the game sometimes the rest of the players will go some place with their parents ... their brothers and sisters. Who the hell comes to watch me play? ... Nobody!
- HÉCTOR** Fernando, you never said you wanted us to come and see you play!



FERNANDO And I didn't ask you to come here today either, so leave me the hell alone!

MOTHER Listen to me, both of you! When your father was alive there were times I could have run away from everything — from him and from you. But I never had the guts to do it. Instead, it got worse because after he died I had to raise you alone. I might have made mistakes but I don't deserve this from you.

HÉCTOR *Mamá*, living with *papá* wasn't easy for any of us. And Fernando is right when he says that Rafael is worse than *papá*. Why do you have to be with somebody like that?

MOTHER He takes me out, that's all. I get lonely. (PAUSE) Maybe he is like your father in some ways ... I know he drinks ... I've never known what it was like to be with someone who didn't drink ... (PAUSE) You know, when your father used to get drunk and angry, I felt like it was my fault. When you ran away and then had to marry Sandra because she got pregnant, I felt the same way. Now that Fernando is like this, I feel like it's my fault too, but damn it! I've done the best I could. I never meant to hurt you, kids. (SHE BEGINS TO CRY.)



HÉCTOR None of this is your fault, *mamá*. It's just that I don't know what to do anymore, either. You call me for everything! I've got my own problems, *mamá*. Fernando's not the only one!
(PAUSE)

COUNSELOR I know it sounds hard, but people who have been through what you have all been through can work it out. It takes time but it can happen. There are counselors who are trained in helping families of alcoholics.

HÉCTOR (PAUSE) If my mother wants to go ahead with it, I guess I will, too. What do you think, Fernando?

COUNSELOR It's important that you—all of you—work this out together, Fernando.

FERNANDO What for? It won't change anything ... I gotta go. I have practice.

COUNSELOR The coach knows you're in my office. (PAUSE) Don't you think your family deserves an answer?



FERNANDO What do you want from me? You guys don't know what I have to deal with. *(ANGRY)* I never should have come to this stupid meeting!

HÉCTOR Fernando, this isn't just about you, it involves all of us.

FERNANDO Just leave me alone, okay? Leave me alone!!

FERNANDO RUNS OUT OF THE MEETING.

MOTHER Fernando, come back! *Por favor, hijo, come back!*

FERNANDO RUNS OFFSTAGE. THEY STAND FOR A MOMENT. LIGHTS OUT OR EXIT.



SCENE FOUR

THE BASEBALL TEAM IS WARMING UP BEFORE THE BIG GAME. SOME OF THE MEMBERS WERE AT THE PARTY SCENE EARLIER. THE ACTORS WILL BE DRESSED IN SWEATS AND BASEBALL CAPS, AND THROWING THE BALL AROUND. THE COACH HAS A CLIPBOARD AS HE CHECKS OUT THE TEAM. CARLOS IS THERE ALSO.

COACH Okay, guys, just a little more sweat and we're outa here. Let's teach those Wildcats a lesson they won't forget.

TEAM MEMBERS Yeah, let's kick some booty! Were gonna wipe 'em out!

FERNANDO RUNS IN; HE IS OUT OF BREATH.

FERNANDO Hey, coach, sorry I missed the warm-up, but I'm ready anyway.

COACH Ready for what, Fernando? You're supposed to be at the counselor's office.

FERNANDO Oh, yeah, that stupid meeting ... No problem, it's cool. My counselor said I could go to the game.



COACH Sorry, Ortega, I think you do have a problem, and it cost us the last game you pitched. This is a team, you're not the only one on it. I need players I can count on.

FERNANDO Oh, c'mon, coach! You know nobody can pitch like me!
(FERNANDO COUGHS.)

PLAYER #1 You mean nobody can *party* like you! *(SOME PLAYERS LAUGH.)*

FERNANDO Shut up, Gómez! You party as much as I do!

PLAYER #1 Yeah, man, but you don't know when to stop. You want to get loaded after every game or even before the game.

COACH All right, that's enough.

CARLOS Get off of his back, Gómez.

PLAYER #1 You know Ortega's got problems, Carlos. The way he's always loaded he couldn't hit a baseball if it came at him in slow motion.



PLAYER #2 Yeah, his old man was a drunk and now he's a drunk and a stoner!

(SOME OF THE PLAYERS LAUGH.)

FERNANDO LUNGES TO FIGHT. THE COACH AND OTHERS QUICKLY GRAB THEM. THERE IS CONFUSION AS THE FIGHT IS BROKEN UP AND CARLOS PULLS FERNANDO AWAY. SOME PLAYERS ARE HOLDING THE OTHER GUY BACK WHILE OTHERS YELL: "FORGET IT," "CHILL OUT," "LEAVE HIM ALONE."

COACH All right, that's it! I warned you, Fernando. I tried to help and you lied to me, and now you're lying to yourself. I'm sorry kid, but you're off the team! Turn in your uniform! All right, everybody to the bus, you too, Carlos.

CARLOS I'm not going, coach. *(LOOKING AT FERNANDO, WHO IS SITTING ON THE GROUND.)*

COACH Are you trying to get kicked off the team too? *(PAUSE)* All right, I'll give you this break, Carlos, but after today you're gonna have to decide if you're gonna keep on covering for your buddy here. *(EVERYBODY EXCEPT CARLOS AND FERNANDO EXIT.)*



FERNANDO It was cool, the way you stuck up for me, Carlos, thanks a lot, homes.

CARLOS It wasn't cool, Nando. I'm getting myself into trouble by trying to help you. This drinking thing is really messing you up.

FERNANDO You know, I'm not the only one on the team who parties. Practically all the team gets loaded. I just happened to get busted and now they look like saints.

CARLOS Sylvia told me she broke up with you for the same reasons. You're gonna have to face up to it, Nando! Alcoholism is a disease.

FERNANDO Carlos, I know you're my best friend, but lay off the lectures, okay? I don't need to hear about Sylvia or that damn team, or about being an alcoholic, because I'm *not*! (*PAUSE, SMILING AGAIN*) Let's me and you go for a cruise, maybe pick up some babes and have a good old time.

CARLOS You know I don't drink, Fernando.



FERNANDO Who said you had to? Just don't act like my mother or the PTA if I decide to have a couple of beers. What do you say?

CARLOS You'd probably go anyway if I said "no," so I'd better go, just to take care of you. *(HF LAUGHS.)*

FERNANDO We'll see who takes care of who. Let's go, bro.

THEY EXIT. MUSIC PLAYS AS THE LIGHTS COME DOWN.

SCENE FIVE

NO DIALOGUE. THIS SCENE IS DONE WITH MUSIC FROM THE PREVIOUS ONE STILL PLAYING. MRS. ORTEGA IS ON THE PHONE WHEN SOMEONE COMES TO THE DOOR. IT IS A POLICE OFFICER. HE HAS COME TO TAKE HER TO THE HOSPITAL WHERE FERNANDO IS AFTER A CAR ACCIDENT HE AND CARLOS HAVE BEEN IN. SHE EXITS WITH THE OFFICER AS THE SCENE GOES DARK.



SCENE SIX

AT THE HOSPITAL, FERNANDO IS SITTING IN THE WAITING ROOM WITH SOME BANDAGES ON HIS FOREHEAD AND HIS ARM IN A SLING. HE LOOKS DISHEVELED AND CONFUSED. THE OFFICER COMES IN WITH MRS. ORTEGA AND HÉCTOR.

LT. ESPINOZA Son, I'm gonna need your statement about what happened.

MRS. ORTEGA Oh, my God! Fernando, what happened? Are you okay?

FERNANDO *Mamá*, it all happened so fast I can't even remember.

HÉCTOR The officer said you guys were drinking.

FERNANDO After school, me and Carlos just went for a cruise. I had a bottle with me. He didn't drink at all. After a while, I took his keys and convinced him I was okay. It's my fault he's in there instead of me. It should have been me ...

LT. ESPINOZA Listen, Fernando. We have some witnesses that say you were running away from the scene of the accident.



FERNANDO No, that's not true. I was going to get some help. The car rolled so many times, Carlos was pinned under it, and I couldn't get him out. He's my best friend. I wouldn't leave him there like that.

HÉCTOR Officer, do you know how Carlos is doing?

LT. ESPINOZA The doctor says he's in very bad shape. I've seen a lot of drunk driving accidents where teenagers are involved, and your brother is very lucky not to have been seriously hurt or even killed. Let's hope his friend Carlos comes through this okay. I'm going to fill out my report so I'll be needing Fernando to answer more questions.

HÉCTOR Carlos will be okay, Fernando. Right now you have to get your head straight so you can tell the officer what happened.

FERNANDO The whole thing was my fault! I don't know what's happening to me! My whole life is falling apart. Carlos is the only one who really cared, I don't know what I'll do if he dies. I'm sorry *mamá*, I'm sorry. I never meant to hurt anyone ... *(HE BREAKS INTO TEARS.)*

MRS. ORTEGA *(EMBRACES HIM.)* It'll be all right, *hijo*. Carlos will be all right. I know you didn't mean to hurt anyone.



HÉCTOR *(EMOTIONALLY)* Thank God that you're alive, little brother.
(FERNANDO TURNS TO EMBRACE HÉCTOR. MRS. ORTEGA HUGS BOTH OF THEM.)

THE OFFICER STEPS INTO THE SCENE

LT. ESPINOZA Fernando, if you'll step over here I can get your statement.

MRS. ORTEGA Officer, can you tell me what will happen to my son?

LT. ESPINOZA I don't know, Mrs. Ortega. Drunk driving is a very serious offense, especially in this case. People don't often realize how many people get hurt when it comes to alcohol abuse. Unfortunately, Fernando will have to deal with the consequences for a long time.

FERNANDO MOVES SLOWLY ACROSS THE STAGE WITH THE OFFICER TO ANOTHER CHAIR WHERE HE SITS DOWN. HÉCTOR AND MRS. ORTEGA SIT TOGETHER AS THE DISPATCHER'S VOICE CAN BE HEARD ON THE OFFICER'S HAND-RADIO. HÉCTOR AND THE MOTHER LOOK SADLY TOWARD FERNANDO, WHO SITS WITH HIS HEAD HANGING DOWN IN THE CHAIR.

THE END



B. *La decisión es tuya* (Spanish Version)

1. Personajes

SRA. ORTEGA Quedó viuda y con dos hijos, Héctor y Fernando, hace varios años. Durante su vida ha tenido que enfrentar el problema del alcoholismo de su esposo, a quien ella facilitaba la adicción cerrando los ojos a sus hábitos de gastar sin control y disculpando el hecho de que no tuviera un trabajo fijo. A causa de su co-dependencia, la señora Ortega no supo proteger a su familia, especialmente a Héctor, su hijo mayor, de los abusos de su esposo. Después de la muerte de su esposo y enfrentando un hogar deshecho y sin contar con medios para subsistir junto con sus hijos, consiguió trabajo limpiando casas. A pesar de que la señora Ortega no se volvió a casar, recientemente ha comenzado a salir con Rafael, un hombre más joven que ella. Ella se siente halagada por la repentina atención de un hombre menor que ella y se siente atraída por su personalidad fuerte, que le recuerda la de su difunto esposo. Esta nueva relación de co-dependencia es un síntoma de los profundos problemas psicológicos que la Sra. Ortega necesita enfrentar y resolver.



HÉCTOR

Es el hermano mayor de Fernando. Cansado de soportar el abuso físico y emocional al que lo sometía su padre, abandonó la escuela secundaria y después huyó para casarse con su noviecita Sandra, a quien había conocido en la escuela. Es responsable y cariñoso y siempre se ha mantenido en contacto con su madre y su hermano menor. Sin embargo, él muestra resentimiento por haber perdido tantas oportunidades cuando era más joven. También siente enojo al ver que su fracaso por no haber roto con su pasado conflictivo está dificultando su relación con Sandra.

SANDRA

Es la esposa de Héctor. Es muy joven e insegura y discute frecuentemente con Héctor, especialmente después del nacimiento de su primer hijo. Aunque trata de alentar a Héctor a conseguir un trabajo mejor y a terminar sus estudios, muchas veces él debe atender los pedidos de ayuda a su familia que está atravesando una de sus frecuentes crisis.



FERNANDO

Un joven inteligente y popular, pero que abusa del alcohol y de otras drogas. Aunque su padre murió cuando él tenía diez años, Fernando todavía recuerda su infancia en un hogar donde reinaba la violencia. Aprendió a manipular a todo el mundo, especialmente a su madre, con el objeto de llamar la atención y para obtener casi todo lo que quiere. El hecho de ser la estrella de su equipo de béisbol y de ser amigo de Carlos es su mayor causa de orgullo. Fernando se siente muy atraído por Sylvia, su novia.

SYLVIA

Es la novia de Fernando y es además muy responsable y estudiosa. Aunque Fernando le cae bien, ella sin embargo no acepta que sea mujeriego ni que abuse de la bebida. Es la primera mujer a quien Fernando no ha conseguido enredar con sus manipulaciones. Cuando se da cuenta de que él no tiene la sincera intención de cambiar su comportamiento, Sylvia termina la relación con él.



CARLOS Es el mejor amigo de Fernando y su confidente, además de estar también en el mismo equipo de béisbol y ha llegado a ser un modelo de conducta para Fernando. Carlos se niega a usar alcohol u otras drogas. Es en Carlos que Fernando busca consuelo cuando Sylvia rompe con él. Finalmente, Carlos es la primera víctima directa del abuso que Fernando hace del alcohol y de otras drogas.

RAFAEL Es el novio de la señora Ortega y a causa de sus cambios de humor frecuentes y de su personalidad dominante, se parece mucho al fallecido señor Ortega. Además, también como éste último, Rafael tiene un problema con el alcohol. A pesar de no vivir con la familia Ortega, Rafael intenta de todas maneras ejercer control sobre la vida de sus miembros. Él detesta tanto a Héctor como a Fernando y se ha convertido en un nuevo motivo de conflicto en el hogar.

SRA. PÉREZ Consejera escolar

TENIENTE ESPINOZA Oficial de la policía

GÓMEZ y GONZÁLEZ Dos compañeros de Fernando en el equipo de béisbol

COACH Entrenador del equipo de béisbol



2. Libreto

PRIMERA ESCENA

EL DRAMA COMIENZA CON LA MAMÁ Y EL HERMANO MAYOR DE PIE, A LADOS OPUESTOS DEL ESCENARIO. AMBOS ESTÁN HABIENDO POR TELÉFONO ACERCA DE FERNANDO.

MAMÁ Hola, m'hijo. Perdona que te llame tan tarde, pero en realidad tengo algo muy importante que decirte.

HÉCTOR No te apures, mamá. ¿Qué pasa?

MAMÁ Es sobre tu hermano Fernando.

HÉCTOR Con razón. Tú nunca llamas para preguntar por mí o mi familia. ¡Siempre es para contarme algo de Fernando! En fin, ¿qué ha hecho ése ahora?

MAMÁ Eso no es verdad, Héctor. Yo también me preocupo por lo que te pasa a ti ... Fernando llegó anoche muy tarde, apestando a ron. También le encontré un cigarrillo de marihuana cuando eché su ropa a lavar. La policía lo ha traído a la casa ya en dos ocasiones y me han advertido sobre la próxima vez ... ¡Las cosas siguen de mal en peor!



HÉCTOR ¿Qué tú quieres que haga, Mamá? Él está haciendo lo mismo que hacen otros muchachos de su grupo.

MAMÁ Eso no es cierto y además no está bien. Tú sabes las que pasamos por culpa de tu padre. El beber lo convirtió en un monstruo, haciendo de nuestra vida un infierno. ¿Te acuerdas? Y ahora tu hermano además está usando drogas ... ¡Yo no podría soportarlo de nuevo!

HÉCTOR Quizás lo que yo debo hacer es ir hasta allí y caerle encima ...

MAMÁ No, Héctor, eso no resolvería nada.

HÉCTOR ¿Por qué no? ¿Acaso no era eso lo que hacía Papá conmigo? Sin embargo, tú nunca trataste de evitar que él me pegase.

MAMÁ Pero por eso tú te fuiste de la casa. Eso no puede suceder otra vez. Tengo que impedirlo. Por favor, hijo, ¿me podrías acompañar mañana a su escuela? Tal vez ambos podríamos hablar con su consejera.

HÉCTOR Yo no sé si pueda ir contigo, Mamá. Si quieres que alguien te acompañe, ¿por qué no le pides a ese novio tuyo que te acompañe? *(SU VOZ DEMUESTRA RENCOR.)*



MAMÁ *(OYÉNDOSE CADA VEZ MÁS DESESPERADA)* No lo involucres en esto. ¡Por favor, Héctor, necesito tu ayuda!

HÉCTOR Sandra me necesita también. Además, él bebé sólo tiene dos semanas de nacido. Yo no puedo dejarlos cada vez que el mocoso de mi hermano se meta en uno de sus líos.

MAMÁ Por favor, Héctor. Hazlo por mí.

HÉCTOR *(PAUSA)* ... Hablaré con Sandra y veremos cómo resolvemos esto.

MAMÁ ¡Así que vendrás!

HÉCTOR Trataré, mamá. Eso es todo lo que puedo prometerte.

MAMÁ Está bien, hijo. Yo iré mañana a las tres de la tarde. Buenas noches.

AMBOS CUELGAN EL TELÉFONO. HÉCTOR QUEDA CONGELADO A UN LADO DEL ESCENARIO MIENTRAS QUE DEL OTRO SE OYE A RAFAEL GRITANDO, LLAMANDO A LA SRA. ORTEGA. FINALMENTE ENTRA EN ESCENA Y SE LE NOTA QUE HA ESTADO BEBIENDO.



RAFAEL

(CASI A GRITOS) ¿Dónde estás? No te voy a esperar más.
(LA OBSERVA LLORANDO) ¿Y ahora qué tienes? No me digas que te vas a quedar llorando toda la noche por ese hijito tuyo. *(PAUSA)* Bueno, está bien. Si no quieres venir, yo me consigo alguien más.

MAMÁ

No espera. ¿Ves? ¡ya estoy bien! Te prometo que esto se me pasa. Sólo deja que me arregle el cabello, entonces podremos ir a donde quieras.

AMBOS SALEN.

HÉCTOR SE "DESCONGELA". COMIENZA A CAMINAR Y RECORDAR MOMENTOS DE SU INFANCIA. SE ESCUCHA UNA GRABACIÓN DE LO QUE PARECE UNA ESCENA DE SU INFANCIA.

VOZ DE PAPÁ

(SE ESCUCHA LA VOZ DE UN HOMBRE BORRACHO)
¡Héctor! ¡Héctor! ¿Quién te dio permiso para estar afuera tan tarde, eh?

VOZ DE HÉCTOR

Papá, estaba con mis amigos. No es tarde. Mamá sabía dónde yo estaba.



VOZ DE PAPÁ Cállate la boca, desgraciado. Te enseñaré a no contestarme, malcriado.

VOZ DE HÉCTOR ¡Déjame, papá! ¡No me pegues, no me pegues!

VOZ DE MAMÁ ¡Déjalo, hombre, no le pegues! ¡Bendito Dios! Estás borracho, ¡déjalo!

VOZ DE PAPÁ ¡Nadie me va a gritar en mi casa! ¡Quítate!

VOZ DE PAPÁ Déjalo! ¡No, no, no, no ...! *(LA VOZ SE DISIPA.)*

HÉCTOR QUEDA MIRANDO FIJAMENTE A LA AUDIENCIA. SANDRA ENTRA, CARGANDO A UN BEBÉ EN SUS BRAZOS.

SANDRA ¿Qué te pasa, Héctor? Parece que acabas de ver a un fantasma. ¿Quién llamó por teléfono?

HÉCTOR *(PENSATIVO)* Era mamá. Ella quiere que yo vaya con ella a la escuela de mi hermano mañana. Parece que anda metido en algún lío.



SANDRA ¿Y qué hay de la cita que tenemos mañana con el pediatra? Héctor, tú sabes que yo no puedo ir sola. ¿Por qué tu mamá no acaba de entender que ahora tienes tu propia familia? Siempre te llama y pretende que tú corras a resolverle sus problemas. ¡Fso no está bien! No es justo, Héctor.

HÉCTOR ¿Qué quieres que haga, que le dé la espalda? Ella no tiene a nadie más quien le ayude. Ella me necesita.

SANDRA ¿Ah, sí? Pues yo también ... Estoy cansándome de cómo ella te llama como si tú fueras el papá de Fernando. “Héctor, necesito esto; Héctor necesito lo otro”. Yo quisiera que tú recordaras de vez en cuando lo que yo necesito antes de decirle que sí a todo lo que ella te pide.

SANDRA SALE. SE APAGAN LAS LUCES O HÉCTOR SALE EN SILENCIO.

SEGUNDA ESCENA

ESCENA DE FIESTA CON MÚSICA DE VOLUMEN ALTO. VARIOS ACTORES, ALGUNOS DE LOS CUALES LLEVAN GORRAS DE BÉISBOI, OCUPAN SUS LUGARES, FORMANDO UN SEMICÍRCULO FRENTE AL PÚBLICO. VARIOS DE ELLOS SUJETAN GRANDES LATAS DE CERVEZA Y CIGARROS DE MARIHUANA



EN LAS MANOS Y APARECEN FIJOS EN POSICIONES QUE LOS MUESTRAN BEBIENDO Y FUMANDO. TODOS COMIENZAN A MOVERSE AL MISMO TIEMPO QUE FERNANDO ENTRA AL CÍRCULO. ELLOS PASAN EL CIGARRO DE MANO EN MANO AL TIEMPO QUE CANTAN SU NOMBRE EN VOZ ALTA. ÉL HACE LOS GESTOS DE TOMAR LA CERVEZA Y FUMAR EL CIGARRO AL RITMO DE LAS VOCES.

LA MÚSICA SE DETIENE DE REPENTE AL TIEMPO QUE ALGUIEN GRITA: "¡CUIDADO! ¡ES UN PROFESOR!" TODOS CORREN EN DIFERENTES DIRECCIONES. ¡FERNANDO QUEDA SOLO EN EL ESCENARIO, BORRACHO Y RIÉNDOSE!

FERNANDO ¡Puf! ¡¡Que alguien pase el "pisto"!!*(RIÉNDOSE)* Yo soy el rey del béisbol. *(IMITA LA POSE DEL BATEADOR)* Vamos, hombre, ¡lánzame un tiro sobre la base! ¡¡Puedo pegarle a cualquier cosa que me lances!! *(SE TAMBALEA E IMITA LA ACCIÓN DE BATIR. AL HACERLO, CAE AL SUELO, MAREADO Y DESCOMPUERTO DEL ESTÓMAGO. LA CONSEJERA OBSERVA LA ESCENA Y SE ACERCA DESPUÉS CUANDO LOS OTROS SE VAN.)*

CONSEJERA Puedo ver cómo tus amigos se preocupan por ti; todos se van corriendo y te dejan aquí. Esto podría causar que te echen de la escuela. ¿No te importaría que te pasara esto?



FERNANDO Quizá me importa y quizá no. Entonces, ¿me va usted a despedir, o qué?

CONSEJERA Podría hacerlo, Fernando. Entonces sí que tendrías más problema de lo que crees. Pero te voy a dar otra oportunidad para solucionar este problema. Te quiero en mi oficina mañana a las tres en punto. Después de eso, no más "quebradas."

FERNANDO Sí, sí. Allí estaré.

LA CONSEJERA SALE.

FERNANDO ¿A las tres? *(FRUSTRADO Y ENOJADO, LE GRIIA A LA CONSEJERA.)* ¡A las tres tengo práctica!

CARLOS ENTRA.

CARLOS Mano, ¿qué pasó? Me dijeron que te cogieron.

FERNANDO *(TODAVÍA EBRIO, COMIENZA A ACTUAR COMO SI NADA.)*
Carlos, mi panita. ¿Qué va hacer, Carlitos? A mí, nunca. Yo soy Fernando, el jugador con el brazo maravilloso.



CARLOS De nuevo estuviste bebiendo. Mano, ¿qué te está pasando?
Mira lo que pareces. No vas a poder ir a la práctica así. Ven
conmigo al gimnasio, quizá con un duchazo esto se te pase.

FERNANDO ¿Una ducha ... ? ¡Qué va! ¡Yo sólo me baño los sábados!
(RÍE A CARCAJADAS.)

CARLOS Deja el relajito, Fernando. Mira que nos van a botar a
ambos de la escuela.

FERNANDO TRATA DE CAMINAR, PERO CAE DE RODILLAS.

FERNANDO ¿Y qué, Carlos? Así tendremos más tiempo libre para ir
buscando “mamis”.

ENTRA SYLVIA POR EL LADO DERECHO DEL ESCENARIO.

SYLVIA ¿No me digas? En tu estado tú no puedes arrastrarte si
quisieras.

CARLOS Hola, Sylvia. Fernando estaba bromeando.

SYLVIA Sí, claro ... Mira, Carlos, déjanos solos, que necesito hablar
con Fernando en privado ...



FERNANDO *(TRATANDO DE SONAR CHISTOSO)* No te pongas celoso.
¡Ella no puede vivir sin mí!

CARLOS Fernando, tú estás loco ... Nos vemos.

CARLOS SALE.

SYLVIA Fernando, le pedí a tu amigo que se fuera porque no quería avergonzarte frente a él. Lo que quiero es devolvarte tu sortija y tu "jacket". *(ELLA LE DEVUELVE LA SORTIJA Y EL "JACKET".)*

FERNANDO Pero, ¿por qué? Óyeme, mamita, Carlos y yo estábamos bromeando sobre lo de otras muchachas.

SYLVIA No, Fernando, tú no te das cuenta de lo que te está pasando. A mí no me impresiona que tú puedas beber más que cualquiera de tus compañeros del equipo. Tú crees que por beber la gente te respeta más, pero no es así. Ni tú mismo te respetas.

FERNANDO ¿De qué estás hablando?



SYLVIA Estoy hablando de cómo has perdido todo el control. Parece que no te importara si te botan de la escuela. No puedes ver más allá de la próxima fiesta ... La gente se burla de ti, Fernando. Están apostando a que tú terminas igual que tu papá.

FERNANDO *(A LA DEFENSIVA)* Eso no es verdad. Nadie sabe nada de lo de mi papá. *(MÁS CALMADO)* En fin, ¿qué importa? Yo no los necesito para nada.

SYLVIA Sí, claro ... ¡como tampoco me necesitas a mí!

FERNANDO Yo no dije eso ... Mira, Sylvia, dame otra oportunidad. Tú sabes lo que siento por ti ... Por favor, no me dejes así.

SYLVIA Fernando, tú eres muy importante para mí también. Hemos estado saliendo juntos desde la intermedia, pero no puedo seguir de esta manera. Lo siento, lo que quiero es que me escuches, dejes de beber y arregles tu vida. Yo no quiero hacerte daño.

FERNANDO SE LEVANTA FURIOSO Y LA INTERRUMPE DICIENDO . . .



FERNANDO ¡Está bien! Olvídalo ... No quiero oír lo mismo de ti, ni de nadie más ...

FERNANDO SALE DE LA ESCENA, MUY MOLESTO. SYLVIA SALE DESPACIO Y CABIZBAJA.

TERCERA ESCENA

HAY CUATRO SILLAS FRENTE AL PÚBLICO. LA SRA. ORTEGA, HÉCTOR Y LA CONSEJERA ENTRAN.

CONSEJERA Siéntese, por favor, Sra. Ortega. Tú también, Héctor.

HÉCTOR Espero que él se aparezca ... ¿quiere que salga a buscarlo?

MAMÁ Déjalo que llegue solo. Él tiene que aprender a enfrentar sus problemas. De otro modo nunca aprenderá.

CONSEJERA Eso es muy cierto, señora Ortega. Lo importante es que Fernando sepa que hay personas que quieren ayudarlo.



MAMÁ

El padre de mi hijo murió siendo un alcohólico hace algunos años, señora Pérez. Con frecuencia él se emborrachaba tanto que golpeaba cualquier cosa que se moviera. Sufrimos mucho mientras ese hombre vivía. Después de pasar por todo eso, no consigo entender por qué Fernando también empezó a beber.

CONSEJERA

Señora Ortega, la familia de un alcohólico siempre queda con heridas profundas, aun después de que el alcohólico se haya ido. En muchos casos, los sobrevivientes tienen que enfrentar estas heridas por muchos años.

MAMÁ

Sólo Dios sabe lo difícil que ha sido mi vida. Yo sé que hubo ocasiones en que debí haber impedido que nos hiciera tanto daño ... pero nunca supe qué hacer, nunca supe cómo detenerlo. *(LLORA EN SILENCIO; HÉCTOR LA CONSUELA.)*

FERNANDO ENTRA; SE VE MUY DESARREGLADO Y "QUEMADO".

FERNANDO

Bueno, ¿y qué haces tú aquí? *(LE DICE CON TONO SARCÁSTICO.)*



HÉCTOR Mamá y yo hemos venido para hablar contigo y con la consejera sobre los problemas que has estado teniendo ...

FERNANDO ¿Cuáles problemas? Todo el mundo exagera.

MAMÁ Fernando, tu consejera me ha estado enviando cartas, la policía te ha traído a la casa en varias ocasiones. ¿Qué te pasa hijo? ¿Por qué estás bebiendo y haciendo todas esas locuras?

FERNANDO No le estoy haciendo nada a nadie.

HÉCTOR ¿Qué crees, que el hecho de que la policía te recoja borracho y endrogado no es nada?

FERNANDO ¡Gran cosa! ... De vez en cuando me voy de fiesta con mis amigos ... ¿y qué? Tú sabes cómo bebe ese novio de ella, Rafael. Porque eso a ella no le molesta ...

HÉCTOR Mira, hermano, a mí ese tipo tampoco me cae bien y con tal de no verle la cara ya casi ni visito la casa. Pero, Fernando, tú eres muy joven para estar en la calle todo el tiempo ... vas a terminar muy mal parado.



- FERNANDO** ¿Crees que a mí me gusta estar en casa cuando ese tipo llega? Él actúa como si fuera su casa, le grita a mamá y la ordena todo el tiempo. Era bastante malo cuando papá era el que la maltrataba, pero este tipo no es nadie. Odio el modo como trata de mandar en la casa.
- MAMÁ** Fernando, Rafael no está tratando de hacerme daño; él me trata bien. Aun así, ésa no es razón para que tú bebas. ¿No ves cómo me duele lo que haces con tu vida?
- FERNANDO** ¿Y qué hay de las veces en que él me hace daño? Cuando yo te necesito, tú estás siempre muy cansada o atendiéndole. Héctor sigue tan ocupado con su esposa ... ¿Qué tiene de malo si yo hago lo mío?
- MAMÁ** Fernando, estamos aquí para que sepas que nos importa lo que haces. ¡Tú no te das cuenta, pero estás arruinando tu vida!
- FERNANDO** Mamá, tú no lo entiendes. Cuando estoy con mis panitas, ellos me tratan con respeto. Cuando lanzo un juego perfecto, me siento feliz porque todos saben que hice algo bueno. Después del juego, a veces los otros jugadores van a otra parte con sus padres, hermanos y hermanas. ¿Quién diablos me viene a ver jugar? ¡¡Nadie!!



MAMÁ Fernando, tú jamás nos has pedido que te vengamos a ver.

FERNANDO Como tampoco les pedí que vinieran hoy, ¡déjenme en paz!

MAMÁ ¡Óiganme ustedes dos! Cuando su papá estaba vivo, hubo muchos momentos en los que pude haberme ido, abandonarlo a él y a ustedes. Nunca tuve el valor de hacerlo. Después de que él murió, ha sido aún más difícil mantener a la familia yo sola. Lle cometido muchos errores, pero no merezco esto.

HÉCTOR Mamá, vivir con papá no fue fácil para ninguno de nosotros. Sin embargo, Fernando tiene razón al decir que Rafael es peor que Papá. ¿Por qué tienes que salir con alguien como él?

MAMÁ Él me hace sentir bien, me saca a pasear. Yo me siento sola. *(PAUSA)* Quizá él se parece a tu papá en algunas cosas. Sé cómo bebe. Pero la verdad es que, ¡yo nunca he vivido con alguien que no beba! *(PAUSA)* ¿Saben? Cuando su papá bebía, sentía que yo tenía la culpa. Entonces tú, Héctor, te fuiste de la casa para casarte con Sandra cuando ella salió encinta, y también me sentí culpable. Pero, caramba, he hecho todo lo posible, nunca he querido hacerle daño a ustedes. *(ELLA ROMPE A LLORAR.)*



HÉCTOR Nada de esto es tu culpa, mamá. Yo tampoco sé qué hacer. ¡Me llamas todo el tiempo! Sabes, Fernando no es el único que tiene problemas: yo también tengo problemas. *(PAUSA)*

CONSEJERA Yo sé que suena difícil, pero otras familias con problemas como los suyos han encontrado soluciones. Todo toma tiempo, pero puede suceder. Hay consejeros que se especializan en trabajar con las familias de alcohólicos.

HÉCTOR Si mamá quiere ir, yo creo que iré con ella. ¿Qué dices, Fernando?

CONSEJERA Fernando, es importante que todos tratemos de resolver esta situación ...

FERNANDO ¿Para qué? Nada cambiará ... Me tengo que ir; tengo práctica esta tarde.

CONSEJERA El entrenador sabe que tú estás en la oficina conmigo. *(PAUSA)* ¿No crees que tu familia merece al menos una respuesta?

FERNANDO ¿Qué quieren de mí? Ustedes no saben lo que yo tengo que pasar ... *(FURIOSO)* Nunca debí haber venido a esta estúpida reunión.



HÉCTOR Fernando, no se trata de ti solamente; esto nos afecta a todos.

FERNANDO Déjenme en paz, ¿okay? Déjenme tranquilo.

MAMÁ ¡Fernando, regresa! ¡Hijo, no te vayas, por favor!

FERNANDO SALE CORRIENDO. LOS DEMÁS QUEDAN DE PIE. LAS LUCES SE APAGAN Y ELLOS SALEN.

CUARTA ESCENA

EL EQUIPO DE PELOTA ESTÁ PRACTICANDO PARA EL GRAN JUEGO. ALGUNOS DE LOS JUGADORES TIENEN GORRAS Y UNIFORMES DEL EQUIPO. EL ENTRENADOR TIENE UNA LIBRETA EN LA MANO Y ESTÁ ESCRIBIENDO CAMBIOS DE ÚLTIMO MOMENTO.

COACH Okay, muchachos, un poco más de práctica y terminamos. Vamos a darle una paliza a esos “Tigres Salvajes” que jamás olvidarán ...

VARIOS ¡Sí, vamos! ¡Los vamos a dejar limpios ...! Tremenda paliza ... ¡los vamos a eliminar!

FERNANDO LLEGA CORRIENDO, CASI SIN RESPIRACIÓN.



FERNANDO *Coach*, lamento haber llegado tarde a la práctica. Pero estoy listo como siempre.

COACH ¿Isto para qué cosa? Fernando, se supone que tú estás en la oficina de la consejera.

FERNANDO Sí, yo sé, esa estúpida reunión. No hay problemas, todo está bien. La consejera me dejó venir hasta aquí.

COACH Lo siento, Ortega. Yo creo que tú tienes un problema muy serio y nos costó el último juego en que lanzaste. Éste es un juego de equipo y tú no eres el único aquí. Yo necesito tener jugadores con los que pueda contar.

FERNANDO Vamos, *coach*. Nadie aquí puede lanzar como lo hago yo.
(*FERNANDO TOSE.*)

GÓMEZ ¡Tú querrás decir que nadie parrandea como lo haces tú! (*SE OYEN RISAS DE LOS OTROS JUGADORES.*)

FERNANDO ¡Cállate, Gómez! Tú parrandeas igual que yo.

GÓMEZ Sí, mano, pero siempre sé cuándo parar. Ahora tú bebes hasta antes del juego.



COACH Ya cállense.

CARLOS Déjalo en paz, Gómez.

GÓMEZ Carlos, tú sabes que Ortega tiene problemas. Está tan metido en alcohol y drogas que no podría batear una bola que viniera en cámara lenta.

GONZÁLEZ Si, su viejo era un borrachón y él ahora es un borrachón y calentón. *(MÁS RISAS)*

FERNANDO LO INVITA A PEELEAR. EL COACH Y LOS OTROS LOS SEPARAN RÁPIDAMENTE. HAY GRAN CONFUSIÓN. FERNANDO TIRA ALGUNOS GOLPES Y CARLOS LO DETIENE. MIENTRAS, SE OYEN GRITOS COMO: "DÉJALO, MANO", "TRANQUILO", "CÁELF ENCIMA".

COACH Ya basta. Te advierto, Fernando. Traté de ayudarte y tú me engañaste. Ahora estás tratando de engañarte a ti mismo. ¡Lo siento muchacho, pero estás fuera del equipo! Ortega, déjanos y devuelve el uniforme. Vámonos ya. Tú también vente, Carlos.

CARLOS Yo no voy, coach. *(MIRANDO A FERNANDO EN EL SUELO)*



COACH ¿No me digas que tú también quieres que te eche? *(PAUSA)*
Está bien, Carlos, te daré una oportunidad. Pero recuerda
que a partir de mañana tendrás que decidir si vas a pasar tu
vida protegiendo a este Ortega.

TODOS SALEN, EXCEPTO CARLOS Y FERNANDO.

FERNANDO Qué bravo cómo me defendiste. Gracias, chico.

CARLOS No fue nada bravo. Mira cómo yo me estoy metiendo en
líos por tu culpa. El ron y las drogas te están fastidiando la
vida.

FERNANDO Tú sabes que yo no soy el único en el equipo a quien le
gusta la parranda. Hay muchos otros en el equipo que
también beben y usan drogas, pero a mí es el único que
castigan. Y todos ellos siguen como si fueran santos.

CARLOS Sylvia me contó que te dejó por lo mismo. Más vale que lo
acespes Fernando: el alcoholismo es una enfermedad.



FERNANDO Carlos, yo sé que tú eres mi panita, pero no me sermonees tú también. No quiero saber más de Sylvia, del equipo, de ser alcohólico ... porque no lo soy. (*PAUSA, COMIENZA A SONREÍR.*) ¿Qué dices si tú y yo nos vamos a levantar algunas “mamis” y a pasarlo bien?

CARLOS Recuerda, Fernando, yo no bebo ni uso drogas.

FERNANDO Y quién dice que tú tienes que hacerlo? Siempre y cuando tú no me pelees como mi mamá cuando yo me tome un par de cervecitas. ¿Qué dices?

CARLOS Probablemente tú iras aunque yo no vaya. Así que mejor voy y te mantengo en la raya. (*AMBOS RÍEN.*)

FERNANDO ¡A ver quién cuida a quién! Vamos, mano.



QUINTA ESCENA

NO HAY DIÁLOGO EN ESTA ESCENA. LA ESCENA SUCEDE BAJO EL MISMO TRASFONDO MUSICAL QUE SE USÓ DURANTE LA ULTIMA ESCENA. LA SEÑORA ORTEGA RECIBE EN SU CASA A UN OFICIAL DE LA POLICÍA. ÉL LE HABLA SOBRE EL ACCIDENTE QUE HAN TENIDO CARLOS Y FERNANDO. LA SEÑORA ORTEGA Y EL OFICIAL DE LA POLICÍA SALEN DE LA ESCENA PARA EL HOSPITAL.



SEXTA ESCENA

EN EL HOSPITAL, FERNANDO ESTÁ TODAVÍA EN LA SALA DE ESPERA CON ALGUNOS VENDAJES EN LA FRENTE Y EL BRAZO. SE VE MUY TRISTE Y CONFUNDIDO. EL OFICIAL VIENE CON LA SEÑORA ORTEGA Y HÉCTOR.

ESPINOZA Hijo, voy a tener que pedirte que me digas todo lo que pasó.

MAMÁ Dios mío, Fernando, ¿qué pasó? ¿Estás bien?

FERNANDO Mamá, todo pasó tan rápido, yo no me puedo acordar de lo que sucedió.

HÉCTOR El oficial dice que estuvieron bebiendo ...

FERNANDO Después de clases, Carlos y yo nos fuimos a dar un paseo. No, él no bebe. Después de un rato, yo tomé sus llaves y lo convencí de que podía manejar. Todo fue mi culpa. Y ahora él está allí adentro, mientras yo estoy aquí.

ESPINOZA Escucha, Fernando, tenemos testigos que aseguran que tú trataste de huir del accidente.



FERNANDO No, eso no es verdad. Yo sólo trataba de buscar ayuda. El carro dio tantas vueltas que Carlos quedó atrapado y yo solo no podría haberlo sacado. Él es mi mejor amigo. Yo nunca lo hubiese dejado abandonado.

HÉCTOR Agente, ¿sabe usted cómo sigue Carlos?

ESPINOZA Los médicos dicen que está en malas condiciones. Yo he visto tantos accidentes con conductores borrachos ... Tu hermano tiene mucha suerte de que a él no le pasó nada serio. Esperemos que su amigo Carlos se pueda recuperar. Tengo que llenar un informe, así que necesito que Fernando conteste algunas preguntas.

HÉCTOR Carlos se recuperará, Fernando. Ahora lo que tú debes hacer es organizar tus pensamientos y decirle al agente todo lo que recuerdes.

FERNANDO Todo ha sido mi culpa. No quería ver cómo estaba destrozando mi vida. Y Carlos fue el único que se preocupó por mí. Yo no sé qué haré si se muere. Lo siento, mamá, nunca quise lastimar a nadie ... *(ROMPE A LLORAR.)*



MAMÁ *(ABRAZÁNDOLO)* Todo se resolverá. Carlos saldrá bien. M'ijo yo sé que tú eres bueno y no querías hacerle daño a nadie.

HÉCTOR *(CONMOVIDO)* Gracias a Dios que estás vivo, hermanito. *(FERNANDO SE VIRA Y ABRAZA A HÉCTOR. EL AGENTE ENTRA EN ESCENA.)*

ESPINOZA Fernando, ven acá, porque tenemos que tomar tu declaración.

MAMÁ Agente, ¿qué le pasará a mi hijo?

ESPINOZA No sé, señora. Conducir bajo estado de embriaguez es una ofensa muy seria. Especialmente en este caso. La gente no se da cuenta del daño que pueden hacer a otros con sus acciones. Desafortunadamente, ahora a Fernando le tocará vivir con las consecuencias.

FERNANDO Y EL OFICIAL SALEN DE LA ESCENA. HÉCTOR Y SU MAMÁ QUEDAN CONSOLÁNDOSE Y LOS VEN SALIR.

FIN



C. Final Rap

Boom

(Written by Omari Shakir, from Latin American Youth Center, Washington, DC)

BOOM, BOOM, BOOM! It's just a BOOM, BOOM, BOOM!

BOOM, BOOM, BOOM! It's just a BOOM, BOOM, BOOM!

Well, this is what we've got to say:

We sure are lucky this was just a play.

'Cause in your life the results are real.

You can't yell "STOP" no matter how bad you feel.

You can't turn back the hands of time:

Death is death, it's not a nursery rhyme.

If you mess with the bottle, a price you will pay.

And this is why we're here to say:

BOOM, BOOM, BOOM!

Fernando, the kid, was always trying

To do the right thing — It's true, I'm not lying.

But his brother ran away, then his father died.

And he couldn't shake the pain, no matter how hard he tried.

Well, mom got busy trying to make ends meet.



Fernando got lonely so he hit the streets.
Drinking, smoking, trying to get attention,
But all he got was after-school detention.
His girlfriend left; he thought it was a dream.
But then he got booted from the baseball team.
So he got real drunk, and jumped into the car.
But as you can see, he didn't get real far ...
BOOM, BOOM, BOOM!

I know some of you are asking yourselves...
"What does "BOOM, BOOM" mean and how can I help?
Well, "BOOM" is the sound that a shotgun makes
When it's fired at you, and your life it takes.
It's like pointing a gun at your own head.
'Cause if you use drugs, you will end up dead.
And drinking alcohol is like pulling a trigger.
Save yourself a little money, just call the grave digger.
"DC General, dead on arrival,
No word yet for the day of the funeral."
So, change your ways, or it might be soon
When you hear a gun go ... BOOM, BOOM, BOOM!



Theater in Community Organizing—The Town Meeting

There are four major steps for successful community organizing in a project like this: (1) harness resources and organize key community leaders and decision-makers into a community liaison group; (2) actively seek participation of community organizations and build coalitions in order to have a better impact on youth issues; (3) increase the community's awareness of the overall goals of the project; and (4) organize youth groups.

A. The Community Liaison Group

The community liaison group is designed to bring together key community decisionmakers as advisors to the project. Its most important function is to mobilize resources and influence the power structure to address the problems at hand.

Before the liaison group is organized, short- and long-term goals and objectives should be carefully selected. Once the group meets, it is important to keep its members focused and working on specific tasks, which may include (1) youth recruitment, (2) promotional activities, (3) fundraising, (4) performance planning, and (5) task force efforts, to name a few. In addition, as it is difficult to organize a group such as this for only one project, it is important to keep in mind the function the group might serve beyond the life of the project. The liaison group will have a better chance of survival beyond the life of the project if it has the flexibility to address other issues of concern to the community.



The community liaison group does need to be a new group. It should include some of the young people who have participated in the project activities. The liaison group is an excellent mechanism for integrating youth and fostering their leadership potential. As the liaison group moves ahead in planning the town meeting, participating in media interviews, or perhaps networking with the school system, it will be very important to involve parent leaders and youth leaders. Thus, the liaison group can also serve as the training ground for many parents and youth who would otherwise not have participated in such an effort. They can become advocates for youth issues in their communities.

The liaison group should be a microcosm of the community at large, and to be effective it should bring together a broad representation of all key players and concerned individuals:

- Representatives from the school system—school superintendents, school board members, principals, counselors, and teachers—should be included. They will provide access to one of the most important systems that must be affected.
- Social workers, alcohol and drug abuse counselors, and psychologists should be represented. They are key players in the service delivery network; they are familiar with the issues, and they will make important contributions to the group efforts.



- A media representative—a newspaper reporter, radio commentator, or television personality—can open the right doors in a system that is difficult for outsiders to penetrate. The media contact will become increasingly important for the promotional campaign and town meeting activities.
- The local chamber of commerce should be represented, as well as individual members of the business community (bankers, developers, retailers) who are interested in community work and could help to identify future funds and resources.
- Representatives from community churches should be included. If at all possible, all denominations serving the Hispanic community should be represented. The religious representatives should be able to speak on behalf of their churches and have the power to make resources available to the project.
- The health professions should be represented by an outreach worker, health promotion specialist, nurse, physician assistant, or physician.
- Professional or amateur local artists—musicians, actors, graphic artists—will bring important expertise and interest to the group.
- Agency directors and local politicians would greatly enhance the group and ensure the diversity of its members.



1. Building Networks and Coalitions

The organization of a representative community liaison group as presented here follows the basic principles of effective networking and coalition-building. Two principles are involved in this process: (1) It is important to enter a relationship of mutual sharing of information and resources; (2) to maximize the impact and effectiveness of the group, it is necessary to get together with concerned individuals from diverse disciplines and viewpoints who share a common interest or goal.

A well-organized community liaison group is an excellent start to effective networking and coalition-building. If the agency is new to a given field, it is important to seek out networks within that field. One way to begin is to call other agencies and professionals in the field and introduce the agency and the project. Getting together for lunch or just requesting a meeting to gather information and exchange ideas can lead to new contacts, who in turn will soon lead to three or four new links. There are many ways to make new contacts:

- Join a professional association, artistic group, or other group that deals with specific issues, and attend their meetings, conferences, special seminars, and related activities.
- Identify the local and State agency or agencies responsible for coordinating relevant services and determine which other services exist in the community to address these issues.



- Determine whether the agency's State or city has a task force and who sits on it.
- Develop mailing lists of all these resources, send them a project description, keep all of these new contacts informed of the project's progress, and invite them to project functions.

While making contacts, it is crucial to remember not to accept funds or support from any groups affiliated with the alcohol and tobacco industries, and to say "no" to money from alcohol and tobacco companies or their subsidiaries.

2. Creating Community Awareness

Community awareness is necessary in order to build an open and accepting climate in which the issues can be addressed by youth, community leaders, and parents. It is important to sensitize community leaders, educators, policymakers, parents, youth, and other concerned individuals to the social and health risks associated with the use of alcohol and other drugs and to other problems confronting youth. The community liaison group can be used as the key resource for mounting the community awareness campaign. These are things to do in the campaign:



- The first step in creating community awareness is to develop a clear message about the project and the issues it addresses, and to deliver this message as a promotional package that includes brochures, posters, and flyers.
- The project should then be promoted in schools, churches, businesses, clinics, media, community agencies, local government offices, and so on.
- The project can be introduced to community groups through an initial mailing followed by a personal contact—a phone call or letter to the key person in that group.
- A press release sent to all local media will present the project to the community, as will presentations to schools, churches, clinics, and other organizations and interviews with newspaper, radio, and TV reporters.
- Whenever an interview is given, youth and other community representatives should be involved. They will be the best promoters of the project.



B. Organizing Youth Groups

A strong youth support network is necessary for the success of the project. To achieve this goal, the first step is to strengthen youth by empowering them—by giving them new knowledge and skills so that they will be better prepared to assume a position of leadership in their communities. Organizing and training the youth group will be the responsibility of the project coordinator and theater director. Once youth have become active participants, they become valuable resources to the project and should be integrated into other project activities such as the community liaison group, media promotion, town meeting, and task force efforts.

It is important to note that the term “Hispanic youth” encompasses diverse and complex socioeconomic, cultural, historical, and geopolitical differences among the different groups of Hispanic origin (Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, Central and South Americans) living in the United States. A theater director coming to a group of Hispanic youth or an outreach worker trying to organize groups of young people cannot rely on preconceived notions based on statistical profiles or generalized cultural definitions, but must always keep in mind the diverse character of this population. To work with the group successfully, organizers and directors must transcend generalized cultural definitions and develop a deeper understanding of the important role played by diverse cultural backgrounds, as well as by socioeconomic, historical, and geopolitical variables.



C. The Town Meeting

One of the major elements of the theater model is its potential to effect change by harnessing community resources and mobilizing key community leaders as well as youth and parents. The efforts that have been set into motion by building networks, creating greater awareness at the community level, and strengthening youth's knowledge and skills come together and culminate in the theater performance.

The performance is most effective if celebrated as part of a community town meeting. It becomes the event around which early efforts to organize community leaders are planned. It is the vehicle through which other youth can be incorporated into the project if they are not directly involved in the youth theater. Most important, the town meeting format provides the forum or platform to launch the project as part of a viable community effort. In more practical terms, it can also give the agency, the project, or the issues a voice and visibility that will, in turn, provide the perfect opportunity to get the attention of potential sources of funding, political leaders, and other key players.



The theater performance in a town meeting format involves four important aspects:

1. Planning the town meeting and the performance. This aspect involves creating a planning committee and considering all aspects of the town meeting, including timeline/work plan; date, time, and place; format; target audience/participants; program development; and promotion.
2. The actual performance and the town meeting.
3. The follow-up to the performance.
4. Future efforts to maintain the components of the project as part of the activities of the agency.



1. Planning the Town Meeting and the Performance

Although the actual time necessary to plan the town meeting and the performance should not exceed 6 months, everyone involved should begin to think about the performance as soon as the project is funded. Many of the decisions that are made about the project in the startup phase will later affect the performance, either directly or indirectly. Therefore, it is important from the beginning to regard the town meeting and the opening performance as an important future target activity.

The following are guidelines for organizing a town meeting. As a model, they follow COSSMHO's *Concerned Parents Project*, which had great success in conducting town meetings. These guidelines can be tailored to the needs of the community in which the project is being implemented.

a. The Planning Committee

It is essential to have a supportive and productive planning committee. One person cannot do all that needs to be done for such an event without the benefit of a strong working committee to make decisions, identify funding sources, promote the event, and so on. This planning effort should enlist the support and collaboration of the following people:



- Agency director. There should always be someone at the top, with access to the power structure, to direct the town meeting and chair the planning committee meetings.
- Project coordinator. This person should act as a resource and logistical support to the efforts of the planning committee.
- Youth. They should be involved at all levels of the planning efforts. Although youth will be involved in the actual theater performances, many others can also help with props, costumes, music, and make-up. Yet others might be able to assist with ticket sales and promotional activities. All of them should have a role and be involved, since they will be the backbone of the project.
- Parents. Like youth, parents can be enlisted to volunteer for a variety of different activities.
- Board members. The board should be involved on the planning committee. Board members will be instrumental in obtaining resources and enlisting the participation of key players.



- Community liaison group. This group should act as a planning committee, together with the agency director or one of the board members as chair. If the original composition of the liaison group does not seem appropriate for this task, perhaps new members should be added or a steering subcommittee named to perform this task.

The planning of the meetings should start approximately 6 months before the event. For the first 4 months, the committee needs to meet only once a month, with the project staff doing all the legwork and logistical arrangements in the periods between meetings. For the last 2 months, meetings might be held twice a month, and additional phone contact kept with key committee members. The meetings should be formally chaired, and minutes should be kept and distributed to maintain a sense of purpose and seriousness.

As the time for the town meeting and premier performance approaches, it may be necessary to divide the planning committee into subcommittees to address more specific tasks/needs. For example, it may be helpful to create fundraising, program, and media/promotion subcommittees. These subcommittees should report back to the larger group.



b. Timeline/Work Plan

Regardless of size or format, 1-day town meetings are always complicated and often risky. Advance planning is essential to prevent disaster and to ensure that objectives are accomplished. A timeline or work plan is an excellent tool for monitoring and facilitating the accomplishment of tasks. This work plan should be developed with input from all concerned parties so that it realistically reflects the sequence of events leading to the meeting.



c. Date and Time

The best time for an event like this is either the spring or the fall. It is better to avoid the summer months when people are on vacation, the weather is hot and muggy, and schools are closed. Similar considerations apply if the area in which the agency is located has harsh winters. In selecting a date for the town meeting and the performance, it is important to take into account the day of the week and the most convenient time to ensure attendance. Selecting a date near a major holiday weekend or another major event in the community will distract attention and reduce attendance. The day of the week is also important. A weekday, during the day, will ensure participation by professionals but will not draw working parents or youth. A weekday evening is a good option, but if it is a school night, remember that working parents are tired when they get home and professionals might not be available. A Saturday, from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., or a Sunday, from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m., seems to work best. However, to decide on the most favorable day and time, it is critical to know the community.



d. Place

The place where the performance is to be held should be familiar to all potential participants and the audience. It should be accessible by public transportation and have adequate parking facilities. It should also have adequate seating capacity for the numbers expected as well as additional rooms or space for day care or breakout rooms for workshops. Check the following points:

- Will the facility be available for the established date and time?
- Does it have a stage, stage lighting, and a sound system?
- Is there a rental fee?
- Will the lighting and heating/ventilation of the building work during the time chosen?
- Does the facility have equipment for heating food or refreshments?
- Is it adequately insured in case of an accident?



2. Format

The format of the town meeting will depend on the program and, most important, on how the meeting contributes to the overall goals. The selection of a town meeting format will also depend on the target audience and the number of participants. Some options follow:

- One town meeting format simply consists of the theater presentation followed by a question-and-answer session with the audience. The audience responds with solutions or questions from the floor. After the process is completed, resolutions and recommendations are developed. This is an excellent format that works well in all types of communities and gives the audience an opportunity to interact with the young actors and to contribute to the final outcome of the meeting. This format calls for a dynamic, well-organized moderator to facilitate the process. An additional option is to invite a panel of three or four experts to talk about the use of alcohol and other drugs after the performance. The speakers should be articulate and, most important, they should present different points of view. The key to the effectiveness of this format is to encourage audience participation, which can be achieved by having an energetic and dynamic performance.



After the discussion, it is crucial for the moderator to move the group to a resolution/recommendation phase. Recommendations should be formulated by group consensus. Most important, a plan should be made for follow-up and implementation.

- Another interesting format is the more traditional conference style. The theater performance is presented at the beginning, and the participants break into workshop sessions afterward. The theater performance portion of the meeting should outline the issues and present a challenge to the group as its members begin their participation in the workshop sessions. Workshops should be limited to no more than four consecutive sessions. Sessions could be rotated so that participants can have the benefit of attending all of them.

After the workshop meetings, it is important to reconvene the group in a general assembly to bring the day to closure. This would be a good time to get some recommendations from the participants and to inform the group of follow-up activities.

Both of these formats and variations thereof have been used with success. Each agency should determine which one is best suited for the community it serves.



a. Target Audience/Participants

The target audience/participants will influence many aspects of the town meeting, especially the format and program. The target audience most suited for the objectives of this project should include youth, parents, professionals (teachers, health professionals, etc.), and other concerned individuals. It is important to include youth and parents as panelists or to invite them to be participants.

b. Program Development

Program development is a most important aspect of the performance and must take into account the suggestions and input of the committee. Here are some tips:

- It is advisable to select for the performance a theme around which everything else will be planned. This theme can be used to design a logo and build the promotional strategy. The issues that need to be addressed should be identified early in the process, and the result expected from the performance should be clear from the start. Knowing what result is expected will help in determining the program agenda and the most appropriate format.



- If there are going to be speakers after the performance, boring or uninspiring ones should be avoided. It is important to have a dynamic speaker who can articulate the issues and generate audience response to achieve the level of audience and community involvement that is the ultimate purpose.
- VIPs who should be asked to participate in the town meeting include the mayor, school superintendent, members of school boards, school principals, teachers, media personalities, legislators, mental health professionals, and juvenile justice officials. Although VIPs or other leaders should be included in the ceremonial aspects of the activity, they should not be among the major presenters. A reception held before or after the performance is a good way to observe protocol and give VIPs recognition or to present some with a token or award. They could speak at the reception if they wish to.
- The panel should be a sample of people with different viewpoints in order to stimulate discussions.



3. Promotion

A well-organized promotional campaign is key to the success of the town meeting.

Here are some tips:

- A basic mailing list is a valuable help. The one used by the agency can be the starting point with all the new contacts made through the project added to it. Youth who have participated in the project can help develop a special strategy to attract other teenagers. There should be two mailings: the first, announcing the town meeting, perhaps in the form of a flyer; and the second, sending a notice about the meeting at least 2 weeks before the event, in brochure format.
- Although there is no hard evidence to prove that posters have an impact in getting people to attend events, it is still a good idea to put up posters all over the community—in churches, schools, health clinics, and so on. Some churches might want to announce the meeting in their bulletins, and school principals might want to send a special notice to parents.
- These mass efforts should be as systematic and far-reaching as possible. However, most of the promotional work will be done by the one-on-one contacts that the liaison group, youth, staff, board, and parents will have with their networks of friends and colleagues.



- Electronic and print media are invaluable allies. The media expert in the community liaison group will become crucial at this point.
- A press conference to announce the project and the date, time, and place for the town meeting should be held at least 2 to 3 weeks in advance. It should provide as much information as possible about the program goals and objectives and the impact expected as a result of the town meeting. The first press conference should spark the interest of the press in covering the event and provide a stimulus for the press to follow the town meeting story to its completion.
- Articles in the community newspaper and PSAs on the radio or TV are another way to disseminate information about the project, the issues, and the upcoming event. They should provide specific information on date, time, and place.
- TV interviews on a local talk show have been known to work well. To give visibility to youth in the theater group, it may be a good idea to have them interviewed on TV.



4. What Else Will Be Needed?

- It is important to plan for standard supplies such as promotional packages of flyers, posters, brochures; postage and letterhead for other mailings; audiovisuals for the event; and packets for distribution at the town meeting, including the program and other background information on issues. A photographer and recording equipment should be available for the occasion.
- Refreshments of some kind should be served. Depending on the format, refreshments might be coffee and doughnuts, lunch, or afternoon refreshments. Timely delivery of refreshments should be ensured and an adequate place to serve them should be provided.
- Child-care services are essential to attract a large number of parents to this event. The arrangements should be carefully reviewed to ensure that there are enough babysitters to separate children by age groups. There should be recreational activities as well as refreshments for the children.
- Transportation is not easily accessible in some communities. Unless special arrangements are made, perhaps with the schools, to provide transportation for participants who need it, they will not come.



- The town meeting can be easily funded with donations and grants. This one-time event is an attractive opportunity to ask corporations and businesses in the community to show support by picking up the costs for printing, refreshments, and so on.
- There are always last-minute details to handle before an event such as this. To avoid unpleasant surprises, participation of speakers and panelists should always be confirmed in writing, and they should be provided with exact details of time, place, and content of presentation. Participation should be reconfirmed by phone 2 days before the event.
- Two weeks before the meeting, a briefing packet with information on the event should be mailed to local media. An individual should be assigned to accompany media representatives who attend the meeting, to give them any information they need. The day before the meeting, a news release should be issued and the local media (print, radio, TV) called, to follow up on expected coverage of the event.
- The day before the event, it is important to check the facilities and the availability of maintenance personnel during the event in case of a problem.



- It is also critical to make sure that microphones, lights, speakers, and other audiovisual equipment are in working order or will be delivered on time.
- Transportation arrangements should be checked.
- Programs should be finalized and printed; materials on alcohol and other drug use prevention photocopied, collated, and put into packets to be distributed to participants.
- A registration desk should be set up and nametags typed.

D. The Town Meeting and the Performance

Besides being an ideal showcase for the theater presentations, town meetings create an excellent opportunity to build networks and create community awareness regarding alcohol and other drug use. For the town meeting, each site will formally prepare project participants to assume the roles of community leaders and organizers. Each participant will have specific responsibilities regarding the planning and execution of the town meeting. There are many details to attend to on this day, so the key to success will be good teamwork:

- Posters should be set up at the main entrance of the meeting place to direct people to the right room.



- A table or tables should be set up at the entrance, with volunteers (youth and parents) to greet participants and give them information packets and nametags.
- VIPs (mayor, legislators, etc.) should be met at the door by the agency head or by a board member and then taken to another room arranged as a special waiting room for them.
- A special briefing packet should have been prepared for media attending and someone assigned to stay with media representatives and to provide additional information on the program and the agency.
- A registration/attendance list should be kept with the names, addresses, and phone numbers of all participants. This information will be a valuable addition to the project mailing list.
- A photographer should be contacted to take pictures. To ensure that the event is recorded as well, it might be a good idea to invest in or rent a video camera.
- An evaluation form should be prepared by the agency and enclosed in the registration packets, for participants to complete. A staff member should be assigned as an observer to take additional notes of important aspects of the process. Comments and recommendations from the audience should be carefully recorded.



1. Follow-up to the Performance

Even the most successful town meeting is ineffective if nothing happens after the event. It is important to remember that the purpose of the performance is to mobilize key players into an action agenda and that the follow-up to the performance will lay the groundwork for the next step—building long-term impact.

Following are some things that can be done:

- It is important to write personal thank-you letters as quickly as possible. Everyone who participated in either the planning or the event itself should receive a personal thank-you letter.
- Soon after the event—no later than 2 weeks—the planning committee should reconvene for a debriefing session with others from the staff, board, youth, and parents who had an important role in the town meeting. It is important for the group to think through what happened and what the course of action should be. After this initial debriefing meeting, the project's liaison group might be the body to implement and follow up on the performance recommendations.
- After all the input from the participants has been gathered and analyzed, a press conference should be planned for a postperformance report.



- It is important to publish a report on the proceedings of the town meeting. This report should especially highlight recommendations and the procedures needed to implement them. Ideally, the proceedings report should be published within 6 months and distributed to all who attended the meeting. If the cost of printing prohibits such wide distribution, the report should at least go to the key leaders.
- A calendar of performances by the youth theater should be developed. The town meeting and the premier performance is just the first step in introducing the youth theater to the community. The second step is to make the youth theater available to the community as an integral part of alcohol and other drug use prevention and education efforts.

2. Future Efforts

Many resources and dedicated individuals have been engaged in these activities over an extended period of time. No doubt there have been difficulties as well as successes, but certainly the experience has led to new insights, contacts, and rewards. A new stage begins after this event, and now the question is, “What next?”



One of the important next steps is to make certain that the project or special components of the project are institutionalized and thus remain a part of the agency's programmatic activities. The following are helpful considerations:

- In this process of institutionalization, it is extremely important to have adequate follow-up to the performance by (1) holding debriefing sessions with staff, board, and the community liaison group; (2) compiling recommendations and formulating an implementation plan; (3) sending appropriate thank-you notes to supporters, participants, and community business leaders; and (4) preparing a calendar of future theater performances.
- The next step is to assess which project components seem to have the best fit with the agency and thus would be worth keeping. It is time to evaluate what worked, what did not, and why.
- The community liaison group can be kept as an ongoing advisory group to the agency, to provide continuity between initial efforts and future activities.



- Keeping the youth theater component of the model seems to work best. In most demonstration sites, even after funding for the project was reduced, the youth theater group was easily incorporated as part of the agency's other programmatic activities.
- A proposal should be submitted to several funding sources. Diversity is the key to success, and it can be achieved by approaching the key contacts in the foundation and corporate sectors that were identified during the performance.

Involvement in the project and in related issues in the Hispanic community has introduced the agency to new networks and prepared it to assume a leadership position. It is important for the agency to get involved and to create an impact beyond the project. Following are some suggestions:

- Possibilities of involvement can be found with government and private nonprofit groups that are working on issues related to the use of alcohol and other drugs. In addition, if the agency's State or city has a special task force on this topic, the agency should get involved in it.



- Contacts should be able to help to identify which task forces, committees, commissions, or community boards are open for new representatives or members. With their knowledge, skills, commitment, and experience with Hispanic issues, individuals from the agency will be valuable additions to these groups.
- The appropriate persons should be approached, informed, and cultivated in order to get one or more of the liaison group members, youth, parents, or a member of the agency's staff elected to one or more of these representative bodies. As a strategy, the agency should have several candidates qualified and willing to fill such positions.
- The agency should make the most of boards, organizations, and other committee work at the national level where the project participants can make a contribution and have an impact beyond the community.
- Once again, it is important to remember not to accept any support from the alcohol and tobacco industries.