



Grand Rapids

The YWCA will empower women, promote diversity and advocate for justice and equality.

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**YWCA TAKES A LEAD IN BRIDGING
COMMUNICATION GAP WITH HISPANIC COMMUNITY**

Effort aims to better support Hispanic victims of violence and save lives.

Language should never be a barrier to life-saving services and the YWCA of Grand Rapids wants to better ensure this by strengthening services for victims of violence within the Hispanic community. **Beginning Wednesday, September 7, 2005 (8:00 am – 10:00 am) the YWCA will host its first tutorial class that will teach basic Spanish to front-line staff working in programs that serve domestic violence and sexual assault victims. The class will meet at the YWCA (located at 25 Sheldon Blvd., SE in downtown Grand Rapids) throughout September and will provide a total of 20 hours of instruction.** Participants will learn key language skills that will allow them to facilitate telephone and face-to-face communication with Spanish-only speakers. This will include learning vocabulary and pronunciations that will allow participants to assess a victim's situation, share general referral information, give important directions, and set up appointments. In addition, participants will also receive a tutorial DVD so that they can practice and maintain their new skills.

Carla Blinkhorn, YWCA President/CEO, cites a continued organizational commitment to strengthening services for domestic violence and sexual assault victims throughout our community as the reason for offering the Spanish Tutorial Program. "We see no indication that domestic or sexual assault is more prevalent in the Hispanic community. What we do know is

because many community organizations are geared almost solely for English-only speakers those who do not speak English have great difficulty accessing services. With this introductory program, the YWCA is taking a first step in overcoming the language barrier for our Hispanic community in order to serve victims who may reach out for help, often while they are in desperate crisis.”

The 2000 U.S. Census reported Grand Rapids’ Hispanic/Latino community to be 13.1% of our population, the second largest in Michigan and slightly above the U.S. percentage of 12.5%. Just three years later, the Hispanic community increased in Kent County by approximately 7,300 people. YWCA class registrants, eager to better serve victims of violence within the growing Hispanic community and representing 13 area organizations, caused the YWCA’s class to reach capacity almost immediately. Participants include representatives from law enforcement, the district court, and victim advocates. Blinkhorn says, “We’re delighted at the response and are hopeful that this effort will produce a stronger community-wide response for all victims of violence.”

For further information about the YWCA’s Beginning Spanish Tutorial Program, please call 616-459-7062, ext. 127. On-camera interviews with YWCA staff and select participants can be arranged. Limited opportunities to film classroom activities after September 7th can be arranged as well.

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