

CSUN Spanish-Language Media Project Targets HIV/AIDS



Written by Information Provided to San Fernando Valley Sun

Thursday, 28 June 2007

The AIDS hospice sits on the outskirts of a Tijuana colonia called La Morita, near a cluster of industrial plants. By the time one reaches it, paved roads have turned to dirt. Beyond Casa Hogar la Memorias ("Home of Memories"), signs of human activity dwindle away to nothing.

This spring, the hospice was the headquarters of nine Cal State Northridge students enrolled in the university's new interdisciplinary minor in Spanish-language journalism. The students went there during spring break in April to research and report on AIDS in the Latino community, and came back with a deep sense of journalistic responsibility and personal growth.

The results of their work, "Relatos contra el silencio: El sida en la comunidad Latina" ("Stories Against the Silence: AIDS in the Latin Community"), is a 48-page special edition of El Nuevo Sol, the campus' Spanish-language newspaper. In moving detail, it tells the stories of the Casa's inhabitants and beams a spotlight on the issue of AIDS in the Spanish-speaking community.

By the time they complete the project, conceived and overseen by journalism department chair Kent Kirkton and Spanish-language media minor program director José Luis Benavides, the students will have compiled a multimedia oeuvre of radio, print, video, Web and what the professors say is "PowerPoint reporting."

Kirkton learned about Casa Hogar at a conference organized by Promotoras, a nonprofit network of health advocates. Soon afterward, he and Benavides developed the idea for the media project. The topic of HIV/AIDS in the Latino community, Kirkton said, presented a challenging reporting experience and the chance to provide a service to the community.

The Spanish-language minor was a natural springboard for an original multimedia project, said Benavides.

"With traditional media dying and new forms emerging, it was a way to break some rules of what is going on in journalism," he said. The CSUN students, he said, have created a hybrid news product with information and opinion delivered on a variety of platforms.

Benavides and Kirkton accompanied student journalists Ana Cubías, Alondra Hernández, Natalia Zelaya, Alonso Yáñez, Adolfo Flores, Esmeralda Orozco, Moisés Reyes, José Luis Méndez and Nancy Molina to Casa Hogar.

Their preparations had included lectures from AIDS experts, assigned readings and required immunizations, but life at Hogar la Memorias was "eye opening" for most of the students. The hospice's 29 current patients and seven volunteers taught the CSUN students the meaning of courage, honesty and optimism, the students said.

Yáñez, a junior who is radio coordinator on the project, covered an individual who had helped obtain food for the hospice before the man's own health deteriorated and he became a patient himself. Sensing a "bigger story," Yáñez and his radio crew went to the patient's barrio and learned that he had fought hard to bring in basic amenities such as electricity and water.

The day after returning from Tijuana, Yáñez and the other students were grieved to learn that the HIV-infected barrio hero had died.

Cubías, a senior involved with the project's print portion, acknowledged the "heartbreak" of the assignment.

"As a journalist, you had to be understanding, but at the same time professional, maintaining that respect with the interviewee, drawing the fine line between the subject and yourself as a reporter," she said.

Molina, in charge of the video component, agreed. She recalled a hospice cook who, paralyzed on one side, walked with difficulty up the dirt path to a small grocery store to demand justice when Molina was shortchanged after a purchase.

"His whole life had been injustice and rejection, but he still demanded justice for me," she said.

[Close Window](#)