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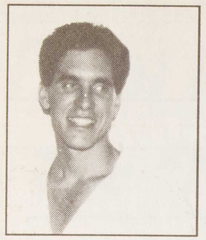
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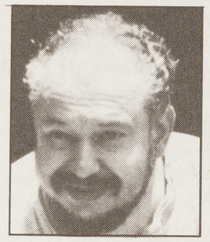
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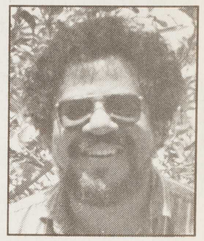
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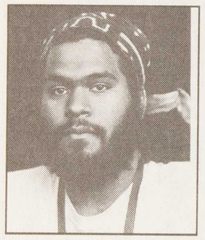
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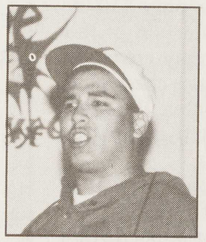
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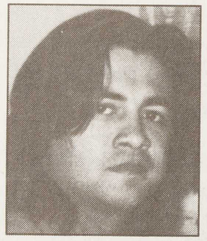
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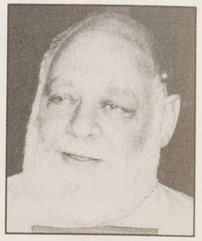
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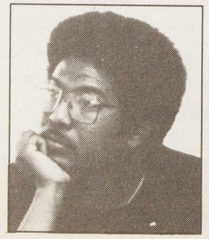
Mark Toney

Updates

With Litte Funding, Latinos Tackle AIDS

Original Article: "Organizing to Fight AIDS," Fall 1990, Volume 3, Number 4.

Ten years into the AIDS epidemic, organizations of color are still having a difficult time finding the money to do effective educational campaigns to stop the spread of HIV disease, which causes AIDS.

In June 1992, for example, the National Task Force on AIDS Prevention announced the start of the first national campaign aimed at reducing high-risk sexual behavior among gay and bisexual Latinos.

Task Force Coordinator of Latino Programs Juan Rodríguez, explaining why it has taken so long to launch a safe-sex campaign in the Latino community, puts the primary blame on the lack of funding: "Only one organization working with gay men of color got funding last year, and that was us. Funding is really the key to AIDS prevention campaigns: you really can't do anything without it.

"It wasn't until 1987 that the first campaign aimed at Latinos was funded. We fell behind in the battle against AIDS, and we are still behind."

Struggling in Isolation

"Latino agencies have struggled in relative isolation from other organizations," says Christopher Gortner, who works with a gay/lesbian Latino organization called CURAS. "Mainstream AIDS organizations are bigger and stronger and have been in operation a longer period of time, so they are able to garnish the funding to do big outreach campaigns. The big AIDS groups all have their multicultural programs, and I'm happy to see money get put into them. In my opinion, however, I would rather see the money go to direct service providers in the [Latino] community, and I'm sure the same is true in any community of color."

Gornter admitted, however, that few Latino AIDS groups — or organizations of any kind, for that matter — had taken on the lack of funding as an issue to be addressed by direct action. "There is some quiet action being taken," he said, "but it doesn't have anywhere near the same impact as a hundred screaming queers banging into [pharmaceutical company] Burroughs-Welcome."

Little Direct Action

Two years ago, the Trendsletter concluded, following a survey of a number of AIDS advocacy organizations that work in communities of color, that they suffered from a common "reluctance to go outside the political boundaries common to service agencies." Very few participated in the kind of direct action employed by ACT-UP (the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power), or had "adopted an explicit community organizing model that allows for the use of more confrontational tactics or is aimed at empowering communities to fight for their rights around AIDS."

This still holds true. Meanwhile, while AIDS cases among gay white men have leveled off after years of intensive public educational efforts, cases in communities of color continue to skyrocket.

For example, according to the latest statistics in Contra Costa County (near San Francisco) AIDS cases for Latinos have risen from 7% of the total to 12%, while for African Americans the proportion has risen from 16% to 26% from 1989 to 1992. These numbers are replicated nationwide.

Efforts to reach Latino women are even further behind outreach to men. The Iris Center in San Francisco has a new Spanish poster campaign aimed at women, but in terms of outreach little is being done.

Even the National Task Force on AIDS campaign mentioned above keeps its focus on gay and bisexual men as being the population most at risk. Latino women, however, have the shortest life expectancy of all population groups after an AIDS diagnosis.

"Always with a condom" is the slogan for a new ad campaign aimed at reducing risky sexual behavior in the Latino community.