

La Avenida and Latinos in Recovery

by Erin Egloff, B.A.

As a result of conversations within Common Ground Health's Latino Health Coalition in early 2019 and ongoing discussion among its members, a heroin/opioid work group was established as a committee of the coalition. North Clinton Avenue neighborhood leaders and health advocates Rudy Rivera and Carlos Santana led this group of healthcare providers, academics, researchers, analysts and community program organizers in a conscious effort to understand the specific barriers to treatment and challenges to sustained recovery experienced by the people of La Avenida.

“Ethnography is the anchor of advocacy.” Rudy Rivera, the Father Tracy Advocacy Center

The social and economic havoc resulting from interpersonal, institutional and structural racism in the United States is directly linked to poor health outcomes in communities of color. Current and historical regulations, legislation, policies and practices have resulted in irreversible damage. With a foundation rooted in that context, it quickly became clear to the group that targeted resources and efforts would be necessary to address the community's needs. To determine those specific needs and honor the perspectives of those in the neighborhood battling substance use disorders, the work group decided to gather stories and data to demonstrate why a “one-size-fits-all” approach has been insufficient for this population.

Two projects were identified as the cornerstones of the work group's commitment to bringing information and advocacy to a broader audience to initiate positive changes in the area. The first, a quantitative survey of local people struggling with addiction who have taken part in area treatment programs, would establish a baseline of the current

population's experiences and shed light on why relapses after treatment are so frequent. This data is currently being reviewed and analyzed.

The second, a report outlining recommendations to address specific population requirements for successful recovery, was already in the works. A beacon of warmth and hope in the heart of North Clinton, the Father Tracy Advocacy Center and its founding director, Rudy Rivera, had been working with Dr. Nancy Chin, an anthropologist at the University of Rochester, and her undergraduate students on a project that included in-depth qualitative interviews with nearly 30 men and women in the area who had lived with and/or continue to live with addiction. The transcriptions and interview analyses were shared with the work group, which then collaborated to make important structural and editorial contributions to the resulting white paper, *La Avenida and Latinos in Recovery: Programmatic Requirements for Success, in the Words of La Gente*.

The white paper's themes are clear and unsurprising: opioid use in this population is largely in the form of heroin and fentanyl; pathways to substance use are overwhelmingly caused by trauma and poverty; and Latina women suffering from addiction have specific ongoing challenges that traditional treatment programs largely do not address. The recommendations included are intended to provide new options to lead to a higher rate of sustained recovery for Latinos in our area. A holistic approach is no longer optional after hundreds of years of systemic oppression and 150 years of public systems being designed and operated for those with privilege.

The paper was released in April 2022, after three years of steadfast dedication while the project was threatened to be derailed by gun violence, the COVID-19 pandemic, and other life-and-death priorities. In those three years, reminders of the work's importance were shared

regularly as group members informed one another of local overdose fatalities in and around the neighborhood; lives lost, and family and friends shattered.

In times like these, wise people accept blessings when and how they come, and one has surely been the love and respect that has emerged within this tight-knit work group. In the last three years, their work and camaraderie has transformed from a sincere collaborative effort into a committed and capable family. This white paper and the upcoming quantitative survey report are the culmination of the original projects, but this family's work to improve the conditions for the people of La Avenida is just beginning.

Read *La Avenida and Latinos in Recovery: Programmatic Requirements for Success, in the Words of La Gente* at www.fathertracycenter.org/whitepaper22.

Further reading/referenced resources:

The Color of Health: The Devastating Toll of Racism on Black Lives, Common Ground Health - media.cmsmax.com/ravk3pgz5kltluj51r08c1/37712-common-ground-health-book-reader-spreads-fix.pdf

Hard Facts Update: Race and Ethnicity in the Nine-County Greater Rochester Area, August 2020, ACT Rochester and The Community Foundation - www.actrochester.org/tinymce/source/2020HardFactsUpdate/2020HardFacts.pdf

Benchmarking Rochester's Poverty: A 2015 Update and Deeper Analysis of Poverty in the City of Rochester, ACT Rochester and The Community Foundation - www.racf.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/RACF-Poverty-Report-Update-2015.pdf

A Profile of the Hispanic/Latino Community in Monroe County: A Demographic and Socioeconomic Analysis of Trends, March 2019, prepared for the Ibero-American Action League and La Cumbre by the Center for Governmental Research (CGR) - www.actrochester.org/tinymce/source/19_R-1875_ProfileoftheHispanic-LatinoCommunityMarchUpdate.pdf