

At a Glance

Current Title
Youth Works Coordinator

Employer
Congreso de Latinos Unidos

Major
Political Science

Sample Entry-Level Positions

- Youth Works Coordinator
- Summer Freedom School Staff Member
- Truancy Intervention Coordinator
- Delinquency Prevention Coordinator

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Championing Children Coordinating Youth Opportunities with Cynthia Chavez '02



Cynthia Chavez's frenetic daily routine at Congreso de Latinos Unidos is a radical departure from her subdued schedule at Haverford College. As Youth Works Coordinator at the Philadelphia organization she is constantly traveling to student placement sites for her Year-Round Youth Works Program.

Congreso is a community based organization that works in the impoverished neighborhoods of Eastern North Philadelphia. Its mission is to "strengthen Latino communities through social, economic, education, and health services; leadership development; and advocacy." Chavez first became involved with the organization working in their Summer Freedom School, a day camp targeted at Puerto Rican and African American students. First, as an employee of Congreso's summer program and now in her current role Chavez supports each

facet of this mission. She ensures that the Year-Round Youth Works Program operates successfully. In this program high school students work with elementary and middle school aged children, tutoring and assisting in activities such as drama, arts, and sports. A Service Learning Project is also incorporated into her program, which matches the students with community partner organizations. Chavez ensures that the students are paid, maintains the necessary materials for the placements, obtains the necessary work permits, checks that the students are fulfilling their requirements, and teaches a weekly class addressing urban issues relevant to the students.

Chavez's realism has greatly helped her to connect with her students. Her classes confront "real world" issues relevant to the students, such as street violence, domestic abuse, and HIV. She spoke of one particular class during which they had a useful and enlightening discussion about a widely publicized case of child abuse. Her willingness to tackle these difficult problems allows her to communicate more effectively with her students about the problems they face on a regular basis. She replies matter-of-factly, "You have to take these things in stride."

Chavez acknowledges that her job demands a certain level of emotional engagement. She comments, "If you're doing it for the money, the kids will know." Her co-workers provide her an emotional outlet. She derives strength by sharing her problems as well as her successes with her co-workers during their regular Thursday night get-togethers. "We push each other through the difficulty," she explains with a cheerful tone.

Despite the disheartening images Chavez has seen in her short time at Congreso she maintains hope for her students. She is buoyed by the fact that she has encountered many people that truly care about helping underprivileged youth. Chavez's job at Congreso has revealed the field of child advocacy as an area in which she has found challenging and rewarding work.

~ Johanna Francis '03