



HELP - NEW MEXICO, INC.

5101 COPPER NE ALBUQUERQUE, NM 87108 PHONE (505) 265-3717 FAX (505) 265-5412

Contact: Rita Garcia McManus, Workforce Development Division Director

Telephone: 505-766-4950

Email: rita@helpnm.com

U.S. CONGRESSMEN BEN RAY LUJAN TO SPEAK AT THE HELP- NEW MEXICO ESCALERA YOUTH SUCCESS CEREMONY

HELP - New Mexico, Inc. (HELP-NM) and the National Council of La Raza (NCLR) are pleased to announce the successful completion of the 2011 Escalera Program cohort on the 15th of May, 2011 at 2:00PM at the Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) Foundation Office located at 1112 Plaza Del Norte, in Española, NM.

Congressman Ben Ray Luján will be the guest speaker at the Ceremony. Other speakers include Mr. John Martinez, HELP-NM's Executive Director, and Simon Lopez, NCLR's Director of Workforce Development.

In 2006, NCLR, in collaboration with PepsiCo Foundation and PepsiCo, Inc., created the **Escalera Program: Taking Steps to Success** to promote economic mobility for Latino youth by increasing educational attainment, career planning, and access to information about advanced careers. In 2008, HELP-NM implemented the first rural Escalera program model in the Northern New Mexico communities of Española and Las Vegas, New Mexico.

Ms. Rita Garcia-McManus, Workforce Development Division Director of HELP-NM, stated, "This pilot program was a great opportunity for these two communities and the students that were involved. HELP-NM will continue to offer high quality long-term programs to at risk youth in our small communities."

The program provided the participating youth in these two communities with tutoring and mentoring support to assist them with obtaining GEDs and the skills to pursue a secondary education. Students participated in entrepreneurship training which included a statewide entrepreneurship competition that one of the students from Las Vegas won. Citizenship, advocacy and leadership skills were emphasized with the students.

Several of the students had the opportunity to practice these skills during a NCLR sponsored advocacy trip to Washington D.C. where they met with the New Mexico Congressional Delegation. Escalera student Ms. Francisquita Martinez from Española had the following comment after attending the Escalera program's Advocacy Day in Washington, D.C.: "I learned a lot of new things. I was able to better understand the roles of our elected officials and the importance of voting. I enjoyed meeting other participants from all over the country and was able to hear some of them speak. They encouraged us to strive for success and let us know that our opinions and voices really mattered. This exposure has made a long lasting impression on me and I am sure that it will change my outlook on life and consequently provide me and my daughter with a better life."

Escalera participants met with advisors and each other on a weekly basis over the year of the program and learned what steps would be required to pursue secondary education or their preferred career path. They received assistance with Financial Aid applications, college applications, education plans, and also visited colleges and universities in New Mexico and Texas. Each participant is now better equipped to plan for their future and execute their desired life plans.

The Escalera participants all had to complete several required milestones that included obtainment of a GED, completion of entrepreneurship training, and a community service project. The public is welcome to join HELP-NM and NCLR in celebrating the accomplishments of these local youth.

"It is an honor and privilege to have Congressman Ben Ray Luján address our local Escalera youth who have all worked hard and taken a step towards success in their life. All our Youth need a little push, a little direction and positive mentoring in their life" said John Martinez, HELP-NM's Executive Director.

"I especially want to thank NCLR, in collaboration with PepsiCo Foundation and PepsiCo, Inc. for supporting our local initiative" - said John Martinez, HELP-NM's Executive Director.

NCLR, the largest national Hispanic civil rights and advocacy organization in the United States, works to improve opportunities for Hispanic Americans. Through its network of nearly 300 affiliated community-based organizations, NCLR reaches millions of Hispanics/Latinos each year in 41 states, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia.

HELP-New Mexico exists to create self-sufficiency and promote economic opportunities to strengthen families throughout New Mexico. **HELP-New Mexico** is a statewide **community-based organization, a community action agency and a faith-based organization** with over 45 years of experience providing community-based services. **HELP-NM** has over **278 staff** in **40 offices** and/or **Head Start** and **Pre-Kindergarten Centers** throughout New Mexico.