



# *Latinas al Exito:* *Launching Latinas Toward Success*

## ***Project Beginnings***

Members of the Iowa AAUW Equity & Diversity Team began to weave together several concepts:

- The theme of economic security through higher education
- A growing Hispanic population in many Iowa Communities
- The conclusions from the study, *¡Si, Se Puede! Yes, We Can: Latinas in School*, commissioned by the AAUW Educational Foundation in 2000.

Conversations with adult Latinas who hold college degrees confirmed that cultural barriers hinder Latina students from seeking post-secondary education, thus lowering their potential to succeed in the workforce. This spurred the team to action.

A group of college-experienced Latinas and Iowa AAUW leaders designed a plan to work within the Latino culture to take steps to change family perceptions about Latinas and education and the workforce. Local foundations provided funds to pilot the project during 2006-2007 in Marshalltown, Iowa. AAUW Iowa has recently received an AAUW 2-year Community Action Grant to extend the Marshalltown project and replicate it in three Iowa communities by 2009.

## ***Keys to Success***

1. Identifying college-experienced, professional Latinas in the community who are willing to participate as key leaders in the project and as *madrinas* (godmothers) to middle school Latinas.
2. Entering a partnership with the school(s) which young Latinas attend to gain support of school personnel for informational meetings and communications with Latinas who participate in the project.
3. Planning whole-family events, including an Induction ceremony for the young Latinas—the *ahijadas* (goddaughters)—and a *Día de la Familia* (Day of the Family).
4. Planning bus trips to college campuses for the *ahijadas*.
5. Assigning several *ahijadas* to each *madrina* for building special relationships through *madrina*-led small group get-togethers.
6. Arranging discussions between *ahijadas* and Latinas currently in college.

## ***Benefits***

1. Empowerment of the Latinas—both adults and students
2. Exposure for the students to the importance of education to a stable economic future.
3. Opportunity for conversations with family members about benefits of higher education for their daughters.
4. Advocacy for success through education for women and girls