



Diabetes Nonprofit In Trouble, Asks For Community's Help, Donations

By Elizabeth Hsing-Huei Chou, EGP Staff Writer

A Montebello-based diabetes prevention organization that holds free community workshops to help Latinos manage their disease will be spending diabetes prevention month struggling to pay its bills.

Directors of the Latino Diabetes Association say they have received little help, and they remain in the dark about the status of their funds after their bank account was frozen in September as part of an investigation into disgraced campaign treasurer Kinde Durkee.

Executive Director Randy Munoz says trying to get information from federal authorities who arrested and are now investigating Durkee has been "like pulling teeth."

When Durkee was first arrested two months ago, authorities did not notify the organization that their money was in trouble, and two months after first learning from other sources that their treasurer may have cleaned out her clients money making personal purchases, Munoz says they have not been able to determine the status of the \$30,000 in funds they put under Durkee's care.

The amount they lost seems like "nothing," Munoz says, but they use it to hold diabetes prevention workshops throughout Los Angeles.

Munoz says this is a huge blow to his organization, which is trying to address a health crisis among Latinos who are disproportionately affected by diabetes. Of the 650,000 diabetes cases in Los Angeles County, 303,000 cases are suffered by Latinos, he says. The disease often results in serious health consequences, such as blindness and limb amputation, as well as death.



A workshop held by the Latino Diabetes Association in Boyle Heights. (Photo courtesy of the Latino Diabetes Association)

Now plans for future workshops have been put on hold, as efforts to fundraise have also been stymied by a lack of interest. "We've made several pleas and not one person outside of our board members has bothered to pick up the phone to make a pledge ... it's been really trying," Munoz said.

Durkee's higher profile victims, such as United States Senator Dianne Feinstein, have received most of the attention, he said, while smaller organizations like the Latino Diabetes Association, located in a donated space at a municipal park, have been fending for themselves.

While there is a proliferation of diabetes awareness material out there, very little of it speaks effectively to the Latino community, Munoz said.

He says his group tries to hold "culturally relevant" workshops, which include cooking demonstrations and yoga, in familiar places such as churches, community centers, senior centers, libraries and public housing. Many of the people who take their workshops don't have insurance, only speak Spanish, and usually don't have access to sufficient information about how to manage their diabetes, Munoz said. Others may also walk around not knowing that they have diabetes, attributing their sluggishness to a "bad day or bad week," he says.

Elba Gomez, 51, says her family benefited from the Latino Diabetes Association's workshops, in particular her 77-year old father who was taking multiple diabetes medications.

The classes helped her father deal with his diabetes without the use of medication, mostly through advice about how to change his diet and habits. "He used to feel sick all the time, he was sleepy most of the time. Now he's more active because of what he eats. He lost some weight, is more energetic ... we don't worry like we used to before," she says.

Diabetes is a very personal cause for the organization. "We're from the neighborhood, we know people from this community, family, friends who have died," Munoz said.

Last month the organization held a candlelight vigil at Olvera Street in downtown Los Angeles in memory of those who passed away from diabetes complications. Munoz's own 27-year old niece died a month before the organization lost all of its money during the Durkee fiasco.

The Latino Diabetes Association is located at the community center building at Reggie Rodriguez Park in Montebello. Munoz said **they set up a donation button on their website (<http://www.lda.org>). They can also be reached at (323) 837-9869.**

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