



"They put me in a positive direction"

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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ROBERT WOOD JOHNSON FOUNDATION AWARDS LSA FAMILY HEALTH SERVICE AND RAY LOPEZ WITH \$125,000

Ray Lopez receives the 2008 Community Health Leader Award for Family Asthma Program that teaches East Harlem Residents how to Resolve Environmental Health Issues Plaguing their Homes

Lopez Among 10 Americans to Win National Award
for Improving Local Health Conditions

New York, NY (November 14, 2008) – The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation has announced that Ray Lopez, LSA Family Health Service's Environmental Program Manager, is one of ten Americans to receive the Community Health Leaders Award for 2008. Ray is being honored for his work as part of LSA's Family Asthma Program which was developed more than ten years ago to respond to East Harlem's epidemic rates of asthma.

The distinguished annual award honors exemplary Americans from all over the country who conquer huge obstacles to tackle some of the most daunting health and health care problems facing the nation. Awardees are celebrated with national recognition and \$125,000.

This year, more than 800 nominations were submitted from across the United States. Through a rigorous process, the Foundation selected ten outstanding people, all of whom have worked to improve health conditions in their communities with exceptional creativity, courage and commitment. The Foundation chose Ray Lopez this year for helping hundreds of East Harlem's poorest residents resolve environmental conditions infecting their homes and affecting their health.

Ray Lopez works inside the poorest homes of East Harlem. He visits families tormented daily by mold, rodent and insect infestation and other environmental health problems festering in their homes. Ray empowers families by educating them on the root causes of their environmental health issues and teaching them firsthand the skills to resolve their hazardous situations. In-turn, families often lend their newfound expertise to neighbors facing similar conditions - multiplying the number of poor families receiving needed help.

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LSA and Ray Lopez Win National Award

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A central part of Ray's environmental health work is combating soaring asthma rates in East Harlem. Ray, who recalls being treated for asthma in hospital emergency rooms as a child, teaches families how to reduce and control environmental dangers that trigger asthma in their homes. LSA's internal studies show that our asthma intervention techniques reduce emergency room visits, hospitalizations and school absences among the residents he visits by more than 50 percent. Ray also works to eliminate bedbugs, a resurgent issue for families in East Harlem and other parts of New York City.

Ray says: "When I first started running this program, our focus was to assist households on an individual basis. While this approach is very rewarding, I realized that there was a greater need for practical information that could be disseminated in workshops for the public, staff trainings for other organizations and instructional videos. It was also important to speak on behalf of families and share our experiences to neighborhood, city and state coalitions. This aspect of our work not only helps raise awareness, but creates an atmosphere of cooperation which contributes to some policy improvements. All these components are necessary, but our work always centers around the families whom we teach but also learn from on a daily basis.

Ray Lopez and each of the 2008 awardees will join the ranks of 153 Community Health Leaders in 45 states and Puerto Rico honored since 1993. Each new Community Health Leader receives \$20,000 for personal development and \$105,000 for a defined project at their organization. In addition to Ray and LSA in New York, this year, Community Health Leaders hail from Minnesota, Pennsylvania, Alabama, North Dakota, California, Utah, Massachusetts and Hawaii.

LSA Family Health Service, Inc. is a not-for-profit, non-denominational health, education and social service agency founded in 1958. Our mission is based on a profound faith in the innate strength of families, even when their problems seem overwhelming. The staff includes community health nurses, social workers, educators, child development specialists and advocates who work with thousands of the most vulnerable families in East Harlem, one of the poorest communities in New York City.

For more information, please visit:

LSA's web site: www.littlesistersfamily.org

LSA's YouTube page: www.youtube.com/lafhs

http://www.communityhealthleaders.org/leaders/leader/ray_lopez

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