



NATIONAL ALLIANCE FOR
HISPANIC FAMILIES

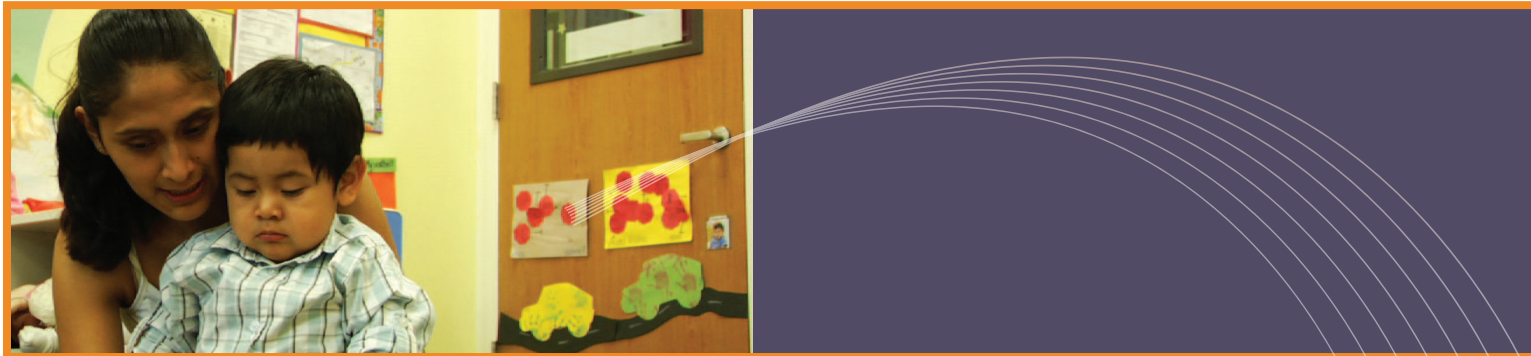


LA DIFERENCIA

***Grassroots Organizations Uniquely Serving
Hispanic Communities Through Culturally
Relevant, Family Focused Programs***

A generous contribution of the W. K. Kellogg Foundation has supported the Center for New Communities, the National Alliance for Hispanic Families (NAHF), and Urban Strategies in meeting with hundreds of Hispanic community leaders in a variety of forums throughout the country to engage in a dialogue regarding strategies to serve the Hispanic community. Several themes emerged from this dialogue regarding needs, challenges, strategies, and opportunities. Importantly, and without exception, this national dialogue has included a discussion of key characteristics of organizations that serve Hispanics best. With great conviction and driven by firsthand experience, leaders ardently defend these characteristics as those that make the difference—*La Diferencia*—between success and failure in reaching, engaging, and providing opportunities for marginalized Hispanic families to thrive.

URGENT ACTION NEEDED



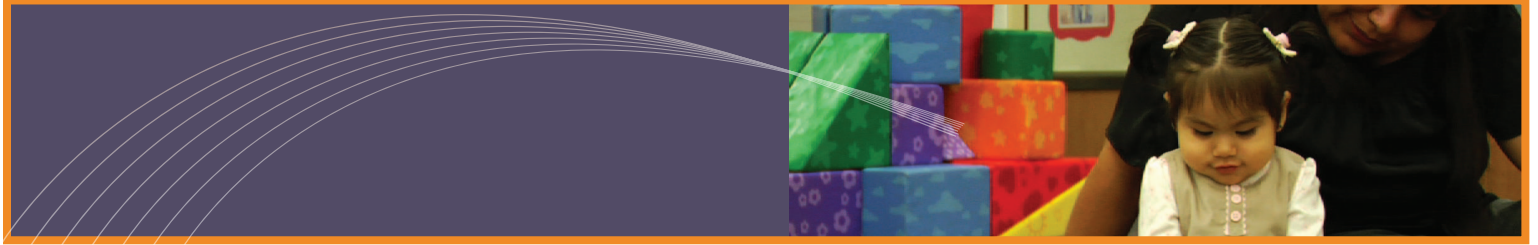
Given that the Hispanic population has become the largest and fastest-growing minority community in the United States, its future and vitality will have a direct impact on that of the nation as a whole. Accounting for nearly half of the country's growth since 2000,¹ it is projected that by the year 2050, the Hispanic community will triple in size to represent 25 percent of the nation's residents and account for 60 percent of the overall population increase within the United States.² The impact of this expansion is reflected in the marketplace as Hispanics controlled \$978 billion in spending power during 2009³ and are expected to account for 74 percent of the increase in the nation's labor force from 2010 to 2020.⁴

This exponential growth has not been without challenges, and many Hispanic families are in crisis. Of the 6.1 million U.S. children living in poverty in 2010, 37.3 percent were Latino, 30.5 percent were white, and 26.6 were black.⁵ The school dropout rate for Hispanics is three times higher than for white youth, and nearly two times greater than for black youth.⁶ While research shows that children of single mothers are more than twice as likely to be poor as those in two-parent families, the out-of-wedlock birth rate among Hispanics remains among the highest of all population groups.⁷ Alarming, Hispanic unemployment is 11 percent,⁸ and Latino household wealth has declined 66 percent from 2005 to 2009.⁹

Despite comprising 16.3 percent of the country's population, Hispanic culture is often misunderstood, especially with respect to the family. Western behavioral treatment models often start with the fundamental notion that the individual, and not the family, is in need. Programs frequently focus on "bits and pieces" of a family—children who have been incarcerated, moms and dads wanting to be better parents, or young children who might lag behind unless enrolled in an early learning program. While these programs may have a positive impact, the benefit for Latinos is far greater when the entire family is involved.

"For Latinos, there is one point at which research and programs must start, and that is with *familia*," says Dr. Luis Zayas, dean of the School of Social Work at the University of Texas in Austin. "Strategic, structural family therapies help reduce antisocial disorders and substance abuse for Latinos, particularly compared to individual therapy. There's just no way around the importance of family in Latino culture." While only a very small percentage of Hispanic-serving organizations have had the opportunity to develop the capacity or technical expertise common among organizations traditionally funded by the public and private sectors, there are four unique and inherent characteristics that have allowed these organizations to effectively engage individuals that others are unable to reach.

FOUR CHARACTERISTICS THAT MAKE LA DIFERENCIA



La Diferencia - No.1

Started and led by individuals who are in and of the community they serve.

Effective organizations are those whose staff and board of directors reflect demographics similar to that of the community being served. Whether it is experience, heritage, background, or place of residence, these shared characteristics provide the organization with firsthand knowledge of the needs and challenges that must be overcome. In addition to this acute knowledge and understanding, this organizational leadership that is in and of the community benefits from trusted relationships that can open doors and remove barriers.

La Diferencia - No.2

Approach integrates the entire family.

Organizations proactively design their programs to engage the whole family. Effective Hispanic-serving organizations recognize that it is culturally unacceptable and, in practice, unreasonable to provide instruction to one member of a Hispanic family without engaging the whole family. For example, to inspire a teen to academic greatness may be for naught if parents and siblings are not engaged and given the opportunity to share ownership in the student's aspirations. To counsel a teen on the negative consequences of teen pregnancy without helping parents learn how to discuss this culturally sensitive issue with their child minimizes positive impact. Effective Hispanic-serving organizations are in and of the community and understand that all programmatic efforts must be in and through the family.

La Diferencia - No.3

Seek out traditionally underserved audiences.

Effective Hispanic-serving organizations do not experience the challenges of traditional institutional service providers who have difficulty in recruiting, enrolling, and maintaining participant engagement. Instead, effective Hispanic organizations often experience growth and demand for their services that outstrip their available resources—simply because successful participants give their personal, first hand of the organization's benefits. In addition, the around-the-clock presence in the community of the organization's leaders, employees, and previous participants validates the organization's long-term commitment to the community they serve.

La Diferencia - No.4

Demonstrate a willingness to lead partnerships that benefit Hispanic families.

Effective Hispanic-serving organizations understand they cannot do their work alone. While potential partner organizations differ in their capacities, as well as their hands-on and inside knowledge of the community's strengths, weaknesses, motivators, and deterrents, effective Hispanic organizations are willing to partner with others, including civic organizations, businesses, schools, and the media. Effective partnerships are win-win relationships that value and respect the Hispanic organizations' unique abilities, knowledge, and relationship within the community.

BARRIERS AND RESTRICTIONS TO EFFECTIVE ORGANIZATIONS AND PROGRAMS



Effective Hispanic-serving organizations are not without challenges that impede their progress in serving their communities. Although some of these challenges require a one-time, event-oriented solution, they are more often chronic challenges that must be addressed over time. Key barriers frequently expressed by leaders of Hispanic-serving organizations include the following:

Apathy and Indifference

Despite the growth of the Hispanic community, relatively few policymakers, civic officials, and national organizations have connected with what happens in Hispanic communities. Although a great deal of energy has been invested recently in the issues surrounding comprehensive immigration reform, it is at the cost of addressing the chronic inequities and disparities experienced every day by hard-working, low-income Hispanic families and children across all issues, including early child development, education, child welfare, school dropout, and teen pregnancy.

For a variety of reasons, individuals who have authority to direct funds, implement policy, and support new programming are often unfamiliar with the real challenges faced by the Hispanic community and, consequently, offer little in the way of practical, relevant, and effective support.

The Challenge Against Prevention

Unfortunately, leaders of effective Hispanic-serving organizations find themselves constantly battling several fronts simultaneously, hoping to address challenges and issues in the Hispanic community before they reach an insurmountable and irreversible tipping point. Too often leaders of effective Hispanic-serving organizations are either fighting a system of inertia or focusing their efforts on remediation and crisis that, while necessary, are not the most efficient use of resources.


BARRIERS

Apathy and Indifference

The Challenge Against Prevention

Too Few Hispanics in Positions of Leadership

Restrictive Emphasis on Evidence-Based Models



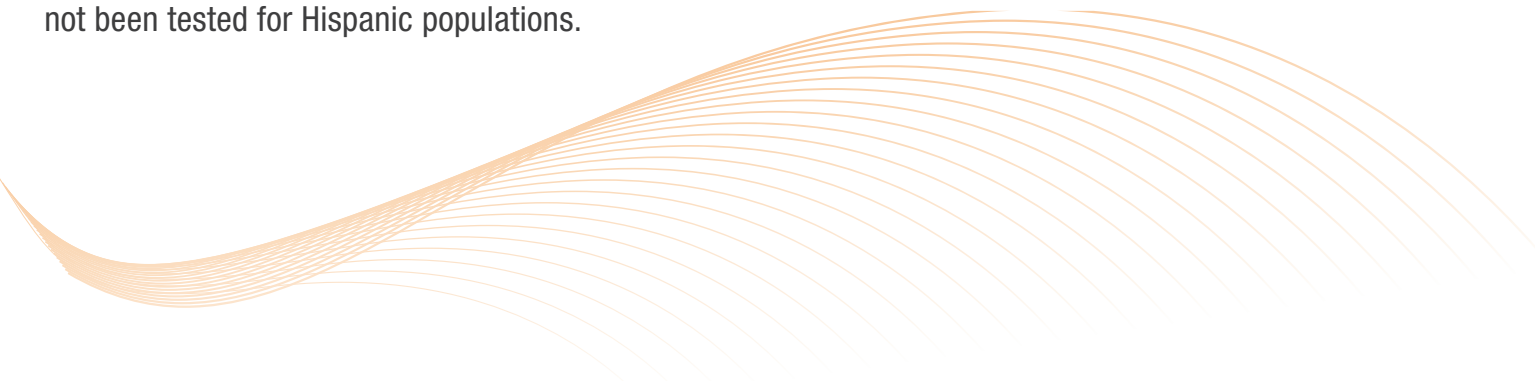
Leaders believe that the best prevention in Hispanic communities is through adequate, family-focused strategies that build on the cultural protective factors within the Hispanic culture. Without a shift in investments and policy to support this long-term approach, minimal improvements will be experienced. Our country's unwillingness to adequately and appropriately address issues such as education, health, violence prevention, and youth development through the Latino cultural preference toward family is using up borrowed time on a ticking time bomb.

Too Few Hispanics in Positions of Leadership

Despite the fact that Hispanics make up 16 percent of the U.S. population, sadly less than 5 percent of congressional members are Latino. In addition, very few Hispanic men and women are in decision-making positions in both the private and public sector. Given the unfamiliarity our nation's civic, corporate, political, and philanthropic leaders have with the critical needs of the Hispanic community, having Hispanics in positions of influence is essential to change.

Restrictive Emphasis on Evidence-Based Models

Because of the historical absence of funding, many Hispanic-serving programs have not had the resources to measure or validate their efforts in a rigorous fashion and, therefore, are not considered evidence-based models. With funders' increased emphasis on evidence-based models—which is often a requirement in funding decisions—effective Hispanic-serving organizations are trapped. They do not have the resources to fund evaluations, nor is there a pool of models from which to select proven to be effective in the Hispanic context. This situation leaves many community-developed, successful programs either ineligible for support, or forced to adapt models that have not been tested for Hispanic populations.



ORGANIZATIONS THAT MODEL LA DIFERENCIA



Soledad Enrichment Action – Los Angeles, CA

Martin Bautista credits the family-focused structure of Soledad Enrichment Action (SEA) Charter School in Los Angeles with turning his life around and saving his family. Martin's father was an alcoholic who rarely came home, and his mother worked several jobs to put food on the table. As a teenager, Martin got involved in gangs and drugs, was thrown out of two high schools, and finally arrested. He says he was considered a threat, and wasn't allowed to attend any school in the district.

At the urging of his probation officer, Martin's mother enrolled him at SEA Charter School, created in 1972 by mothers from East Los Angeles whose sons had been killed by gang violence. The school provides a "last chance" opportunity for students who, because of behavioral or other issues, have exhausted all their public school options. While Martin reluctantly went to class, his mother attended SEA's 20-week parenting program, and counselors and other support staff reached out to help his father overcome alcoholism. More than ten years later, Martin is now a high school and college graduate. He has ended his ongoing volunteer efforts at the school and has now been hired as SEA's director of community support services.



Soledad Enrichment Action (SEA) was started as a community watch program in East Los Angeles by several “founding mothers” determined to minimize gang violence. At the news of her teenage son’s death, the first founding mother pounded on a locked church door and begged the minister for help. Six months later, her second son was killed, and this time she came back and demanded the minister’s help.

Over a series of weeks, this mother and her minister reached out to parents of rival gangs and arranged a meeting in the basement of the church. That meeting ended in a shouting match, as did several other meetings. But in the end, a neighborhood parent watch was put in place. When moms and dads overheard their children making plans to raid a certain neighborhood, parents of the rival gangs were called, and mothers would meet, walk the streets, and make sure there was no violence. “Nothing is as effective as seeing your mother patrol the streets,” one participant at SEA Charter School said.

In time, gang violence dropped, which caught the attention of law enforcement officials, who notified local public officials. Small grants were awarded to the founding mothers and SEA was formed. The church opened up a classroom, and SEA engaged in after-school tutoring programs. That success led to additional funding from local and national groups, more growth, and the first SEA Youth Center.

Over two decades, the organization moved out of the church and received state and federal grants, which led to alternative schools and mushroomed into the community-based SEA Charter School, which opened in August 1997.

Today, the school’s charter—approved by the California state legislature, governor, and Los Angeles County Board of Education every five years—requires the inclusion of each student’s family from the time he or she is enrolled. School leaders believe it’s impossible for students to permanently change their behavior if they work at school all day, learning new habits and attitudes, and then return to a broken home at night. SEA believes that students may be able to learn in isolation, but they generally don’t change in isolation.

When a student is enrolled at SEA, a Family Needs Assessment is compiled, and parents/guardians are required to outline goals and strategies for creating a healthier home environment for their children. The school also requires parents to attend weekly parenting and development classes. In this way, parents become invested in the program and are partners with the school, its teachers, and the administration in making sure their child stays grounded in the program.

Currently there are 18 SEA education centers throughout Los Angeles County serving more than 3,000 youth and their families each year. Students attend the school through referral or application.

The school reaches out to the community to provide services that help families with jobs and healthcare, as well as extracurricular activities for the students and sometimes their siblings, such as sports teams and cultural arts. It’s vital that the students are engaged at the community level so they have positive things to do outside of school to broaden their network of support.

Teachers are recruited from within the community. In fact, many of the staff members are parents of children in the program or are students themselves who have gotten their college degree and then returned to work at SEA. SEA Charter School is thoroughly reviewed and assessed every five years by the state during its charter renewal process. The success rate of the school is measured through a comprehensive analysis forwarded to the state legislature, which continues to give unanimous approval of its charter year after year.

Instituto del Progreso Latino – Chicago, IL


Blanca Olivares was born in Mexico City and came to the United States with her husband as a young bride. She was confident that the English she had learned would smooth the transition to an unknown country and a new lifestyle.

But then she arrived in Chicago. “No one could understand me. They didn’t know what I was saying, and I felt insecure and underestimated and intimidated,” Blanca explains. “My sense of security was completely lost.” With the help of the Instituto, she relearned English. “Instituto is an open door, no matter your education, country, dream or gender. It’s the door that will guide you to another door. Even if you come to the back door, they will guide you through the front door,” she says.

Blanca stayed at home to care for her two children when they were young, but as they got older she began to wonder about her own life. It was while volunteering in a hospital she learned she wanted a job caring for older people. Although she was discouraged by many, Instituto helped her prepare for and pass the GED. “In this country, nobody can stop you. Once I had my GED, I wanted to study to become a certified nursing assistant (CNA). If you have a dream, the only person who can stop you is yourself.” Blanca passed the CNA test and, with the help of Instituto, found her first job. “I was so happy. For the first time in my life I got a job. I was independent from my husband and he was very supportive.”

Next, Instituto helped Blanca apply for and get accepted into a nursing program so she could become a licensed practical nurse. “Instituto helped open the door for me, got me into the program, and provided a scholarship.” Today Blanca is an LPN, earning \$24 an hour—three times what she made as a CNA. “Without this program, I would never be where I am today,” she says. “We are all valuable humans and every person has something to contribute to the community. Instituto helped guide me in the right direction. They gave me courage to continue toward my dream.”



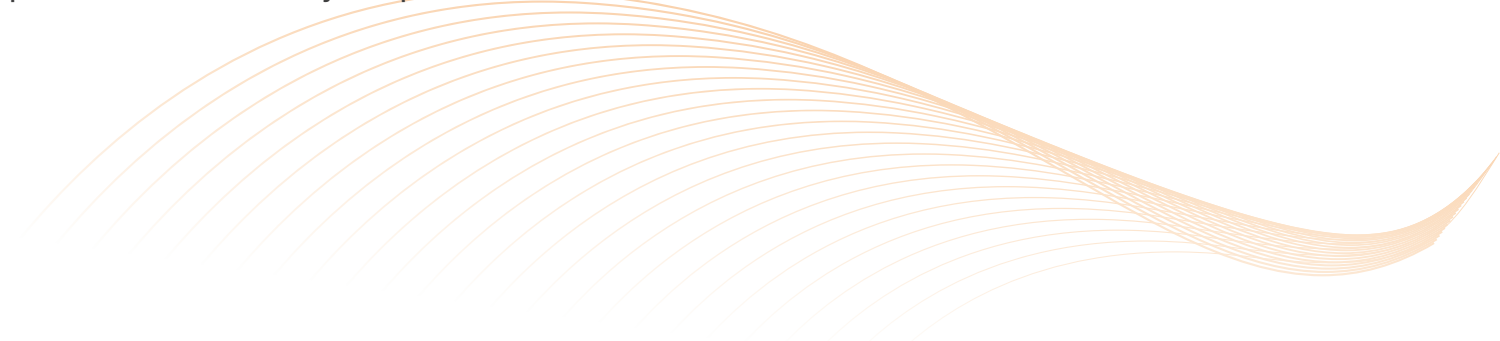



Instituto del Progreso Latino (Instituto) was incorporated in 1977 by Latino immigrants who strongly believed in the value of education and the hope of providing better opportunities for families adjusting to life in the United States. The organization began by offering Spanish literacy classes, teaching immigrants how to read and write, and then branching out to teach English as a Second Language. Classes were taught in churches and schools and any other building with available space. After 35 years, the group’s basic philosophy remains the same: “Education is power.”

In the beginning, Instituto ran primarily on volunteer hours, donated space, and a very limited budget. But in time, small grants allowed for growth, and the organization became a United Way member agency. Instituto bought its first building in 1990 with a \$40,000 down payment, raised entirely by the students through dances, raffles, and fundraisers. “The people who sold the building to Instituto never dreamed they would ever see the \$40,000, but there is a culture of giving in this community,” said Juan Salgado, the organization’s current chief executive officer. “There was strong determination to raise our own money and meet our goals.”

The building brought stability to Instituto, allowing leaders to run their own programs and define their future. To this day, the ongoing involvement of participants in the program remains a key component of the organization’s success, Salgado said. Instituto’s board is responsible for its strategic direction, “pointing its star” toward helping people build secure economic futures in an environment that cultivates their own growth. The board sets the tone and direction, and the administration uses its assets and relationships to define the programs. The board is entirely Latino, and most board members have been students at Instituto, are volunteers, or live in the community. “Our level of connectedness is very high at all levels,” Salgado said. “We are always talking about current realities in the community. The board listens to us, and we listen to them. They point us in the right direction, and then hold us accountable.”

It was a board directive to increase the number of young students who follow through to college completion that led to Instituto’s Health Sciences Career Academy. The Academy is a charter high school with 350 students in grades 9 through 12 from Chicago communities. The school teaches traditional courses within the context of the healthcare industry. Its curriculum focuses on work-based learning, providing career awareness and exploration, as well as opportunities to prepare for healthcare careers at school and at health facilities. Internships are offered for students who qualify at local hospitals, clinics, and medical labs. These organizations employ students on a part-time basis once they complete a certain level of coursework.



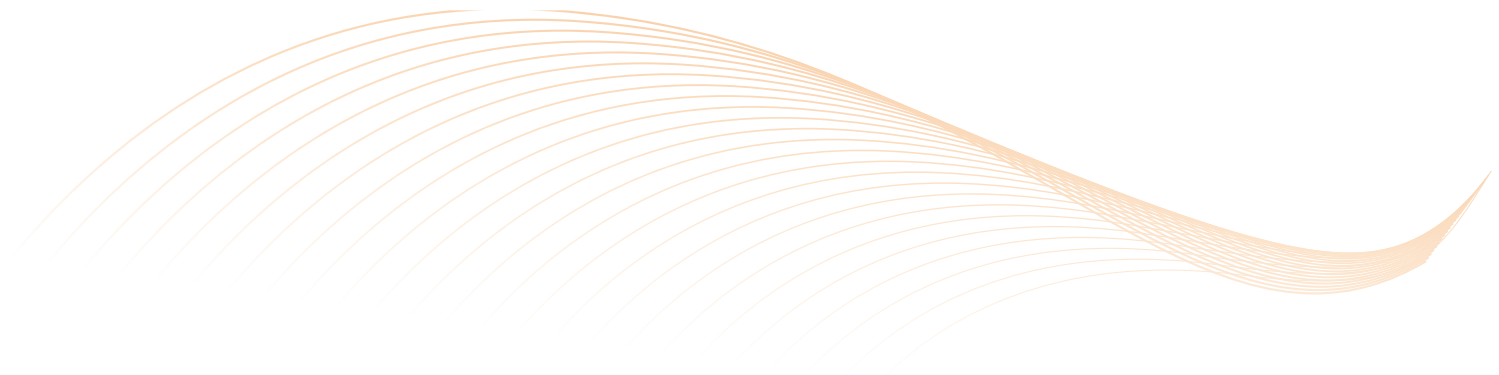


The Academy makes a priority of integrating the entire family from the very beginning of a student's freshman year. Prior to entering the Academy in the fall, ninth-graders and their parents spend the summer learning about the school, college entrance exams, grade point averages, the college admission process, and other Academy requirements. Once school starts, parents patrol the hallways to ensure respectful behavior, and can access Instituto's classes covering a variety of subjects including nursing, ESL, and GED courses.

Instituto currently is part of a national study sponsored by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The agency selected seven entities across the nation as models for moving individuals with low literacy skills into self-sufficient careers. In six years, 2,150 individuals have graduated from various programs and now earn between \$10 and \$25 an hour. An organization is now providing Instituto \$3.2 million to double the number of individuals it serves in this program.

From its small beginnings, Instituto now has 120 different cost centers with major contracts and funding from government, business, foundations, and other grants and donors. Mr. Salgado says taking risks has been critical to the growth and success of the organization.

"Even at a time when we didn't have resources, we still poured investments into things we believed in. We didn't wait around for a foundation to fund our school. We never operate that way. We use what we have to fund what we think is important, and then we grow. When we started our journey we had no assets. Now we have \$20 million in assets," Salgado said. "It's risky business sometimes, but we feel it's riskier to not move ahead."



Comunilife Life Is Precious™ – Bronx/Brooklyn, NY

Anna (name changed) came to Comunilife Life Is Precious™ on the recommendation of her psychiatrist. She lived in Brooklyn, attended high school, and felt her life was not worth living. She, like many other Latinas in New York, considered suicide. More than anything, she felt she had no one to talk to and no one who understood her problems. Both of her parents worked constantly, and she felt isolated at school.




Comunilife Life Is Precious™ gave Anna the listening ear she needed. Surrounded by professional leaders and facilitators, as well as by girls in similar situations, Anna began to open up about her problems. She knew she was being heard and, for the first time, felt she was understood.

Gradually, Anna's parents became involved in the program and learned about the importance of their role in her life. They attended events sponsored by Comunilife Life Is Precious™ that strengthened their bond as a family. Her mother quit her job, and only Anna's father now works outside the home. "This program helped me talk to my parents. Now I have my mother to talk to whenever I have a problem."

Anna graduated from high school this spring, and the staff of Comunilife Life Is Precious™ is helping her with applications to college. She hopes to become a mentor for other girls who enter the program.

"I've found new friends," Anna says. "I don't feel like I'm alone any more. I can talk to facilitators, leaders, other girls, and my parents. I tell the girls they need to have confidence and talk to their parents more. Their parents are their best friends."

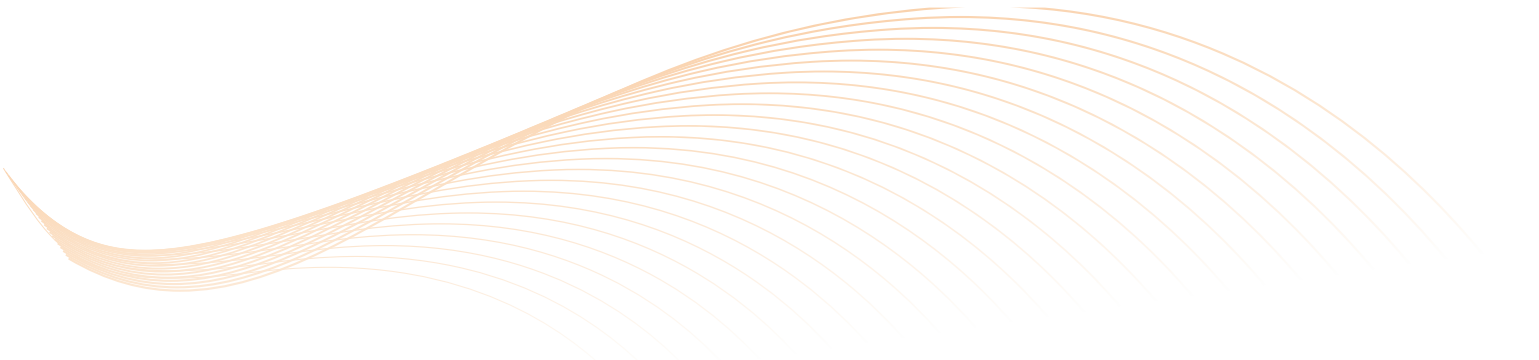



More than a decade ago, Dr. Rosa Gil, president and CEO of Comunilife, was concerned about the high incidence and prevalence of suicide ideations and suicide attempts by Latina adolescents. She was shocked by the 2001 report released by U.S. Surgeon General David Satcher that showed young Latinas with the highest suicide rate in the country. A Centers for Disease Control and Prevention study in 2006 detailed an increase in the incidence and prevalence throughout the country, with particularly high rates in New York City. Since it seemed no one was really paying attention to the problem, and nothing was being done to address it, Dr. Gil and her Comunilife Board of Directors decided they would “do something about it.”

The organization received funding from the New York Office of Mental Health to do qualitative research in the Bronx to determine the awareness and causes of this phenomenon. Parents and citizens were asked to discuss triggers they believed led to the problem among Latinas. They also were asked about possible solutions for the problem, and what steps should be taken to reverse the trend. The study was critical to conceptualizing a “community-defined evidence approach” in response to this high adolescent Latina suicide rate in New York City.

To increase public awareness, Dr. Gil and her staff reached out to the media. Articles ran on Latina suicide in *El Diario/ La Prensa* and *The New York Times*. Public hearings were held by the New York State Assembly Committee on Mental Health in December 2006 and the New York City Council Committee on Mental Health in January 2007. The strategy to increase public awareness in the community at large as well as among elected officials led to a \$100,000 grant from the Community Trust Foundation of New York City. Using the findings of the earlier qualitative research, Dr. Gil proposed a community-defined evidence program called *Life Is Precious*, which began in 2008. Although funding was insufficient, Dr. Gil said it was the “tremendous determination on our part to go ahead with it and look for funding even under the stones. We knew if Comunilife did not address this problem, it would continue to be ignored by our own Latino community, elected officials (including Latinos), and the community at large.”

According to the CDC report, there is a higher prevalence of suicide among Latina adolescents in NYC high schools compared with Blacks, Whites, and Asians. Eleven percent of Latinas in the country attempt suicide. In New York City, the overall rate is 15 percent. But in Brooklyn, Latina suicide attempts total a staggering 22 percent—double the national rate. Dr. Gil said many Latino families in these areas are in crisis and face economic, housing, and other stressors. In addition, there has been some anti-Hispanic sentiment that seems to have added an element of fear for many families.





There is no doubt that Brooklyn has become the epicenter of Latina adolescent suicide. Congresswoman Velazquez provided \$186,000 (for one year) to open Comunilife Life Is Precious™ in her Brooklyn district. In addition, the organization has now received funding from foundations including van Ameringen, Viola Bernard, Macy's, OdysseyRe, Maximus, and the Neuberger Berman Foundation. And though Comunilife Life Is Precious™ also received \$100,000 from the City Council for the first time in 2011, the program still has a \$150,000 shortfall.

“The girls themselves came up with the name Life Is Precious,” Dr. Gil explained. They said they needed a safe place to talk about their problems. They recommended an Internet Café, tutors to guide them through their homework, and educational programs to help them succeed in school. The girls also said there was a need to help their mothers understand the challenges their daughters face.

To date, about 150 girls have participated in Comunilife Life Is Precious™. Of those, all have improved academically, and where the norm is for one of every five girls to attempt suicide, only two in the program have repeated a suicide attempt. “We administer pretests and posttests to all participants,” Dr. Gil said.

Evaluations of the program have been administered through Hunter College School of Social Work and Columbia University. The New York State Psychiatric Institute's Center of Excellence for Cultural Competence is now determining the program's efficacy as a “community defined evidence based practice.” Based on the evaluations, an additional wellness component has been added emphasizing healthy eating and exercise for the girls and their families.

“The facts show that this program is working. It's rewarding to see these girls succeed,” Dr. Gil said.



enFAMILIA – Homestead, FL


Roberto Vadales was overwhelmed by the violence in Homestead, FL: murders, robbery, illegal drugs, gang violence, and more. He and his wife had three young children at home and he was increasingly concerned about their future. He felt inadequate as a father, but he did not know where to turn to learn how to become a better parent.

A cousin referred Roberto to enFAMILIA, an organization dedicated to improving and preserving family life for a large population of migrant farm workers and low-income families in Florida. He enrolled in a workshop there, and during one of his first sessions, Roberto says he was asked a question that initiated a process of change in his life: When was the last time you played with your kids?

“I almost started crying,” Roberto says. “I instantly knew I was losing my time with my family trying to make money. It’s better to reduce the number of cell phones and get rid of cable service rather than work overtime trying to pay for all the things you think you need,” he says. “I decided my family was more important.” The decision to spend more time with his family and less time at work made an enormous difference in the Vadales family. Not only was he around for the children, but Roberto also supported his wife as she finished her high school requirements and went on to college. His daughter is now finishing her senior year in high school while taking courses at the community college. And his sons, ages seven and eight, have become accustomed to having their father involved in every aspect of their lives.

Roberto now works with enFAMILIA as a program facilitator. “Being involved with this program has been the most important experience of my life,” he says. “enFAMILIA has helped me overcome many challenges by teaching me how to be a better father. Now I can share what I’ve learned with other families.”





enFAMILIA was incorporated in 2000 by a mental health counselor/therapist and a certified middle school art teacher who had worked in deep South Dade for 12 years and understood the challenges that poverty presents. enFAMILIA founders and directors, Rocio Tafur-Salgado, MS, CFLE and Carlos Salgado, MFA saw the great need for a program to intentionally serve families, network with community resources, and provide culturally relevant services in locations where people live and by facilitators and teachers that, in many cases, include members of the local community. First and foremost, they knew that in order to be successful within the Hispanic community, they had to work with whole families and involve every member in addressing each problem. Years of experience with Hispanics showed the Salgados that if a parent has a problem, the whole family has a problem. And if a child has a problem, the parents share in it as well. Though the vast majority of participants are Hispanic, enFAMILIA also serves members of the African-American, Haitian, and Anlgo-American communities, among others.

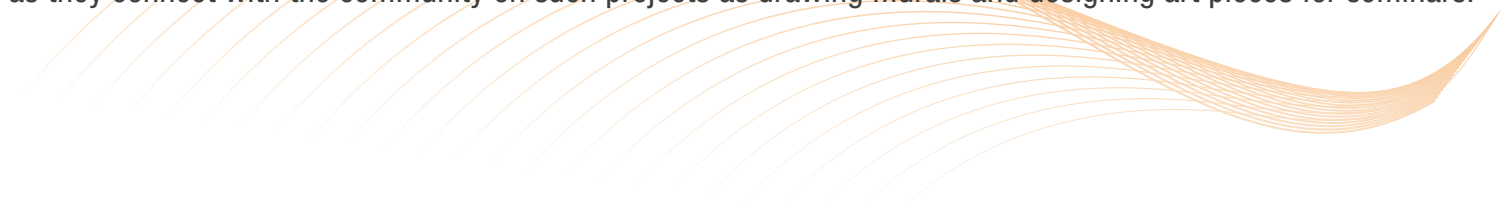
To carry out its program, enFAMILIA has worked in collaboration with 42 partners, including faith-based organizations, social service agencies, nonprofits, universities, and academic and art institutions. These partnerships have allowed enFAMILIA to annually provide more than 2000 members of the community with art education and marriage and family education training.

Through its broad network of partners, classes and workshops are offered on topics such as building strong families and couples enrichment, promoting responsible fatherhood, nurturing parenting (for court-mandated and voluntary parents), and domestic violence and child abuse prevention. These organizations also help enFAMILIA by providing counseling, healthcare, and other services needed to strengthen families. Most recently, enFAMILIA has partnered with the Drug-Free Coaliton to address issues pertaining to substance abuse. In addition, enFAMILIA advocates for immigrant rights and its directors and staff members take part in the advisory board meetings of Miami-Dade County Public Schools and the City of Homestead.

Moreover, enFAMILIA's services are offered free of charge in Spanish, English, and in some cases Haitian Creole to families with special needs, including those of low socioeconomic backgrounds and TANF participants. All the programs use research-based curriculum and evaluation tools to measure outcomes.

Through various programs designed to target the youth of the community, enFAMILIA provides services that cover topics such as bullying prevention, transitioning from middle school to high school, and college preparation. Some of these programs include the Group Leader Mentorship for local high school students; ICAN (Immigrant Child Affirmative Network), a youth development and empowerment program; Gear-Up, which encourages students to stay in school and succeed in college; and the Out-of-School program, which provides art education to underprivileged students in areas where art classes have been cut from public schools.

One of the unique programs enFAMILIA offers is an extraordinary art experience, targeted at disadvantaged families. During the summer, enFAMILIA hosts volunteer graduate art students from prominent universities—such as Julliard, New York University, and Berkley—who work with local middle and high school students. The six-week summer camp is designed to foster talents and provide opportunities in the areas of visual arts, culinary arts, drama, music, dance, film, and photography. For some participants, the art program extends throughout the year as they connect with the community on such projects as drawing murals and designing art pieces for seminars.



Creciendo Unidos – Phoenix, AZ

Oscar Solis was a great concern to his family after they emigrated from Mexico 15 years ago. He was a troubled youth with no social skills who hung out with the wrong crowd and was exposed to gang activity and violence. At home, Oscar's parents had frequent arguments, and the children rarely had time with their dad. The tension was mounting when Oscar recalls his mother "blackmailed" him into going to a program at Creciendo Unidos. "She told me she would let me borrow money from her if I would participate." So Oscar went.


In the beginning he said he didn't like the program, and he was suspicious of everyone who was kind and understanding. But then he noticed that nobody criticized him. For a youth who felt like he never did anything right, this was a change.

While Oscar participated in programs for teenagers at Creciendo Unidos, his mom and dad were enrolled in sessions for parents, and his siblings went to other youth classes. "Our whole family participated, and when we broke into groups, we talked about the same thing—domestic violence, communication skills, finance and budgeting," Oscar says. "It made me feel like I was connected to the whole family unit."

Oscar's home became more calm, and communication improved. His grades also started to improve. "I had used my undocumented status as an excuse to give up. I didn't dare dream about the future, because I knew I would just have to take what came to me rather than choosing what I wanted to do."

During the workshops, all family members were given homework assignments by their facilitators. One week the children would be tasked with saying something nice to their parents. Another week the family would be asked to spend time together. "This was something very new for our family," says Oscar. "All of a sudden, Dad started taking us to the park. At first my siblings and I were suspicious and wondered what he wanted from us." Oscar remembers the assignment of writing a letter of appreciation to his mother. "This was something new and very powerful."



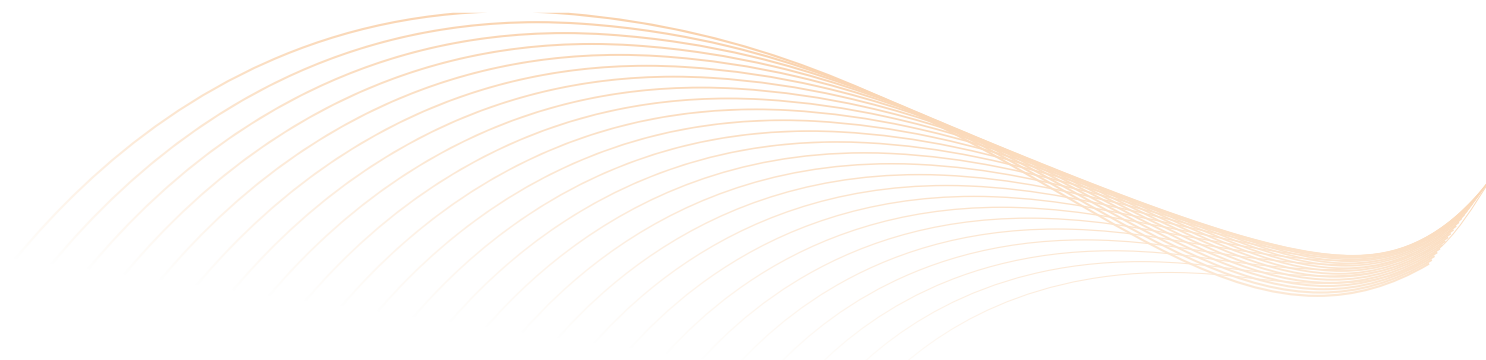


Despite the progress at home, Oscar says it was hard to break away from old friends. “At one point I thought these were the only friends I would ever have, but after talking about healthy and unhealthy relationships, I knew there was something better for me.” Oscar joined clubs at school and began to socialize with people who had similar interests. “These were good students who wanted to improve and get a good education. These new friends were very different from the crowd who used drugs and would spend the night at my house without their parents even knowing where they were.”

Oscar has now been involved with Creciendo Unidos for more than a decade. Over the years he has spent hours volunteering there, and he feels passionate about empowering youth, helping them learn leadership skills, preparing them for college, and teaching them about healthy relationships and boundaries.

“I feel everything I’ve done with my life I owe to this organization. This program has changed my vision of my future,” Oscar says.

Today he is just a few classes away from a college degree. Oscar is studying psychology, and friends ask him why he continues to spend hours volunteering at Creciendo Unidos. “There’s just no way I can explain to them what it means to be given the chance to dream,” he says. “All I want to do is give this chance to someone else.”



Leaders of Creciendo Unidos believe that programs are important, but building relationships is essential among Latinos. From its inception in 1997, Guille Sastre, the group's founder, has been focused on serving families in a holistic manner. "You don't serve individuals in isolation, at least not within the Hispanic culture," she says. "In our culture, people are much more engaged when you focus on 'we as family,' rather than 'I as an individual.'" Once you talk to a Latino mother about the benefits a program will have for her children and family, she's willing to do anything, Sastre says.

As a social worker in Arizona, Sastre worked with teenagers, organized youth prevention programs, developed curriculum, and led parent groups. Wherever she worked, individuals were motivated when they left class and wanted to use their newly learned skills with their families. But they would inevitably return discouraged because they were unable to bridge the gap at home. None of the models in which Sastre worked was founded on the whole-family approach, and every time she suggested this model, she was rebuffed.

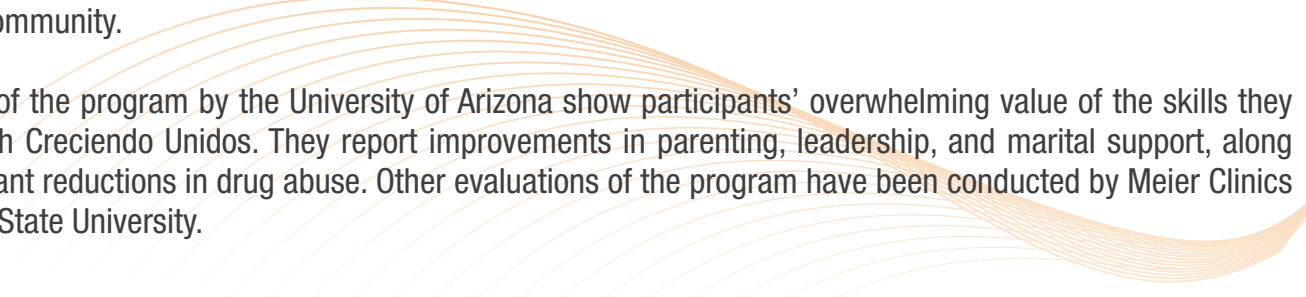
Sastre eventually resigned from her full-time position and with 10 families launched Creciendo Unidos. Together the families began helping Sastre develop a culturally appropriate curriculum that focused on the strengths of individuals and their families.

Creciendo Unidos now offers classes and workshops for couples, families, youth, and men, in addition to leadership training. Through persistent follow-up with children and parents over a long period, families change and their outlook becomes brighter. While it may be a child who has a problem with drugs, this problem affects the whole family. Direct services to the child will go only so far, Sastre says, and then parents and other siblings must be included to have a long-lasting impact. "It's nonsense to talk with parents alone, or children alone without seeing the whole picture," Sastre says.

When the organization was unknown, forming alliances with schools, churches, and other community groups and agencies was challenging. But over time, the organization became known for its success working holistically with families, and today, Creciendo Unidos works with a wide range of partners. Sastre says she is extremely careful to network only with those groups that value clients and patients and that follow through in providing services in a caring manner. The majority of participants in the organization's programs now come from 38 schools in Phoenix as well as Glendale and Tempe. Programs are tailored to the needs of the area, since each group has different challenges and interests.

A key component of the organization's philosophy is that individuals fulfill their real purpose in life when they become strong enough to lead others. Families who participate in the organization's programs are typically so affected they want to stay involved and help others. As a result, Creciendo Unidos has trained more than 500 individuals in leadership and personal growth to give them the skills they need to lead and motivate others. Many families volunteer together—from children to grandparents—dedicated to cultivating service and leadership within the community.

Evaluations of the program by the University of Arizona show participants' overwhelming value of the skills they learn through Creciendo Unidos. They report improvements in parenting, leadership, and marital support, along with significant reductions in drug abuse. Other evaluations of the program have been conducted by Meier Clinics and Arizona State University.



Con Mi MADRE – Austin, TX


Cynthia De La Cruz wanted to be part of Con Mi MADRE when she started sixth grade. Although her goal was to attend college, she wasn't sure how to prepare and stay on track given the dynamics of middle school pressures. Not only did Con Mi MADRE help sharpen Cynthia's focus on school, it also helped build her self-esteem, understand relationships, and handle peer pressures that sometimes felt overwhelming. "It was a safe environment where I knew if I had an issue, there would be someone to talk with me about it."

Cynthia says she and her mother will never forget one event sponsored by Con Mi MADRE. "It was an all-day obstacle course. We split up into teams to work together and go through various obstacles. Just as you thought you had moved through one obstacle, another was put in front of you, or the rules of the game changed. It was really difficult, and it went on forever," Cynthia remembers. "They were trying to teach us that there are significant obstacles in life that you don't see, but you have to move through them in order to succeed. This was a great life lesson."

Cynthia said she relied on that lesson as she applied for, attended, and graduated from New York University. "There were constantly obstacles in front of me that I had to work around," she says.

After graduation, Cynthia worked in New York for People en Español. Although she loved the job, she decided to return to her roots in Austin. Cynthia is now working for Con Mi MADRE as its high school program coordinator. "I miss my friends in New York, but this program has always been in my mind. This is a program a daughter and her mom can experience together. It's powerful, and I'm so glad to be a part of it."





Con Mi MADRE—now celebrating its 20th anniversary—was launched primarily on one statistic that troubled members of the Junior League of Austin in the 1980s: less than one percent of Hispanic females born in Austin, TX who graduated from high school went on to receive a higher education. With the Hispanic population growing in Texas, and the core of all success linked to education, it became the mission of this well-known women’s group to reach out to young girls, help them succeed in school, and provide incentive and tools to apply for college.

The organization appointed a task force to assess many potential programs that focused on females and were culturally relevant to the Hispanic community. They found that when Hispanic mothers became involved in their daughters’ educations, the family dynamics changed and education became a higher priority. The model they found that served daughters and mothers simultaneously was a natural fit for this established women’s group.

The organization recruits girls in sixth grade and keeps them in the program through high school. Bimonthly campus meetings are held during the school day for middle-school girls, and monthly meetings are held for students in high school. During their meetings, middle-schoolers talk about self-esteem and emotional issues along with building healthy relationships with their mothers. In high school, life topics are discussed, such as teen pregnancy, substance abuse, and healthy relationships. For all ages, girls are constantly helped to visualize themselves as college graduates and are taught about the merits of an education and the opportunities it provides. Mothers attend conferences, parent engagement series, and social seminars where they learn about the cultural changes some must make to help prepare their children for college. In 2012-2013, the organization plans to add a financial literacy component to its program, and will provide services to college students beginning with its 2012 senior class.

Con Mi MADRE started as a small effort and grew steadily with the funding and volunteer hours of the Junior League. Over 16 years, the Junior League has donated \$2.2 million, in addition to the hundreds of hours volunteered by more than 200 women. In 2008 Con Mi MADRE became an independent nonprofit organization with a staff of six and a number of interns. Its financial and volunteer relationship with the Junior League is ongoing, and its partnership with its first funder, the RGK Foundation of Austin, continues. Con Mi MADRE also receives in-kind support from the University of Texas School of Social Work in Austin.

Con Mi MADRE has served more than 2,000 mother-daughter teams since its beginning in 1992. Nearly 75 percent of graduating seniors who have participated in the program have gone on to two- or four-year colleges. Of these, 60 percent are the first in their family to attend college—two-thirds of whom come from low-income families.



Family Bridges and FuturoNow


– Chicago, IL / Los Angeles, CA

Antonio and Olivia met through mutual friends. After dating for a while, they lived together for three years. It wasn't an easy relationship. Olivia worked two shifts, Antonio was insecure and jealous, and neither of them was very responsible.

Tired of the conflict and wanting more freedom, Olivia left Antonio. She eventually came back, and after three more years together, Olivia became pregnant. At that point, Antonio and Olivia decided to get married. After the wedding, their problems continued. Because of domestic violence, Olivia left again. She sought help at Family Bridges workshops and domestic violence workshops. These were a huge help to Olivia. Four months later, Antonio also started attending the workshops. The couple began attending parents and couples groups at the church as well.

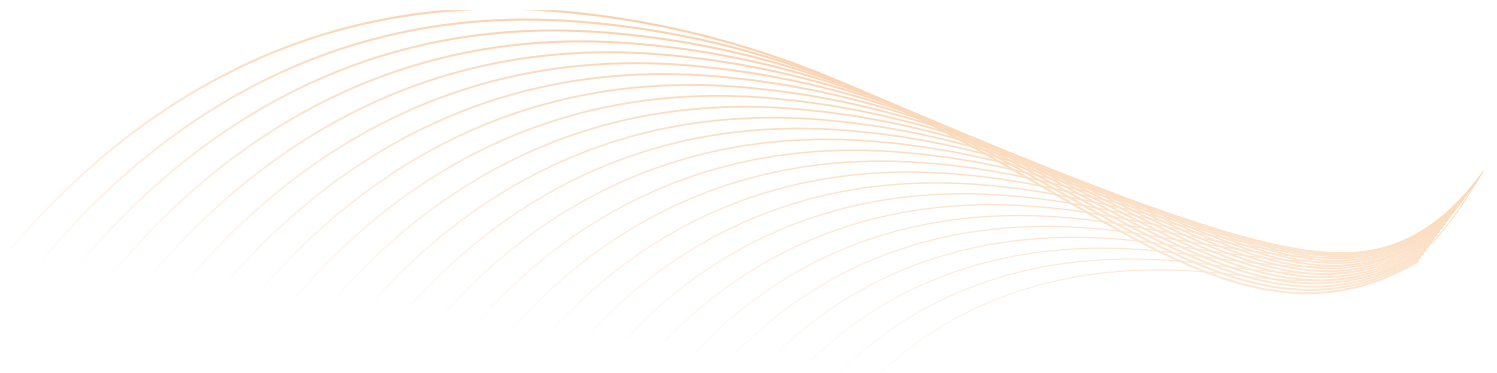
Through these classes, Antonio and Olivia got motivated to rebuild their marriage, and they gained the tools to do so. Today they have better communication and more agreement. They carve out time for each other and make their decisions together. They've seen a tremendous transformation in their relationship. Not only have they created a better quality of life for themselves, but they've included their children as well.

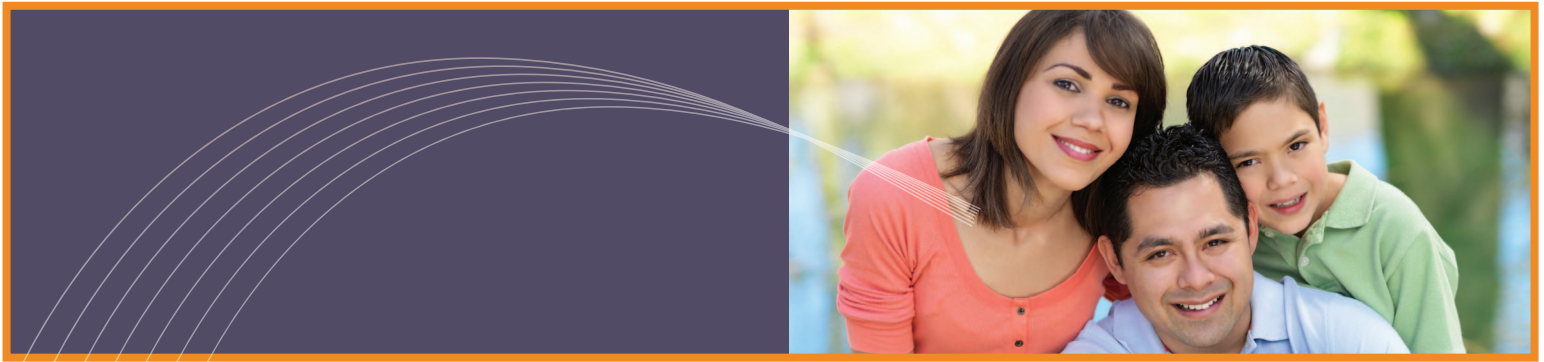




This story reflects many of the experiences of couples who have benefited from the work of Family Bridges and FuturoNow, two intermediary organizations which brought together local Latino-serving community- and faith-based organizations to form a coalition. Both coalitions were formed to improve access to family education programs and to increase the capacity of grassroots organizations concerned about Latino families. Although the grassroots organizations themselves reflect the La Diferencia characteristics, it would have been difficult for major funders to invest in these organizations directly, as they prefer to deal with larger grantees. The strategy of forming these large coalitions which possess La Diferencia characteristics (leadership and staff in and of the community, an understanding and appreciation for a family-centered approach, trust of grassroots organizations being served, and a willingness to equitably partner) has proven highly effective in getting resources to communities where they are needed most. Each coalition was formed through the initiative of an intermediary organization (Meier Clinics for Family Bridges and TELACU for FuturoNow) whose leadership understood the need and the potential of working collaboratively with small Hispanic-serving organizations. Through their vast networks of providers, partners, and affiliates with a shared mission of strengthening families, Family Bridges and FuturoNow each serve an average of 5,000 adults and 2,000 youth per year.

The grassroots organizations are trusted by the Latino families in their community, and the organizations in turn trust the leaders of the coalition, Family Bridges and FuturoNow. As one of the grassroots partners stated, “We’ll do anything and go anywhere they ask us to—they’ve proven that they have our best interest in mind. We trust them.”





RECOMMENDATIONS

Grassroots leaders have made a number of recommendations for policymakers and funders interested in affecting the Hispanic community. Common elements include the following:

1. Prioritize funding for organizations and intermediaries that reflect the four La Diferencia characteristics of effective Hispanic organizations.
2. Support strategies that encourage and promote a whole family approach.
3. Fund efforts to build the pool of evidence-based practices specific to Hispanic populations.
4. Engage Hispanic-serving grassroots leaders in key positions of meaningful and influential decision making, including management and advisory roles.
5. Reprioritize public policy and national discourse beyond immigration to address the vital needs of the Hispanic population.

SUMMARY

Organizations that serve Hispanics effectively have four key characteristics that differentiate them from others. These differences—La Diferencia—are the following: They are led by individuals in and of the community; their programs are designed to include the whole family; they are readily endorsed and recommended by the community they serve; and they are willing to partner. Their efforts are not without multiple, and often chronic, barriers, but these Hispanic-serving organizations are our country's best hope of addressing the growing challenges within the Hispanic community. Policymakers and investors committed to a better future for all Americans will do well to implement specific initiatives that will grow and support these Hispanic organizations.

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