

Centro LatinoAmericano

Contributing to the Integration of Latino Families
in Lane County

Marcela Mendoza and Heather McClure

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“Funders and donors don’t know what we do at Centro LatinoAmericano. We need to let them know what we do here, so they would continue supporting our agency and would even increase their support. We need to bring in more funds to keep Centro open,” said a case worker.

Background and Purpose of This Report

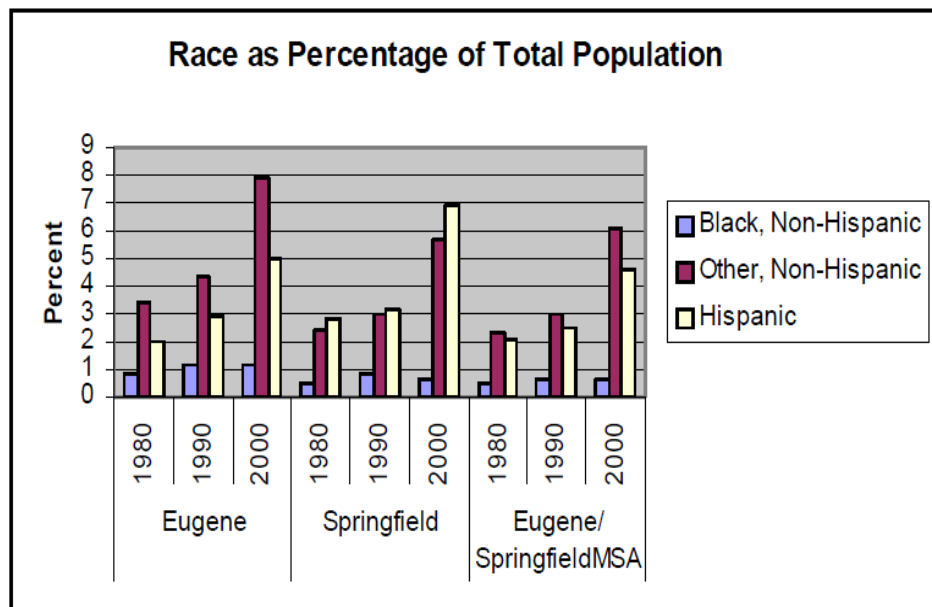
Centro LatinoAmericano (Centro) was formed in 1972 by a group of Chicano students from Lane Community College and the University of Oregon to meet the needs of *Mexicano* immigrant families in Lane County. In 1976, Centro became a bilingual and bicultural not-for-profit 501 (c) 3 organization, and since then it has continued to serve as the main avenue for the social and civic integration of the Latino population in Lane County. Many former Latino employees and volunteers with the center occupy today leadership positions throughout the county, contributing their skills, and enthusiasm to the advance of public institutions, non-profit organizations, and local businesses. Centro is still the primary access-point for marginalized and linguistically isolated members of the Latino community in the county— particularly foreign-born Latin Americans with less than high school education whose families live at or below poverty level. “If Centro disappears, said case-worker Asia Reynolds, it’s going to be much more difficult for the larger community to integrate these immigrant families, because no other social service agency is as proud of their contributions and understands their achievements the same way we do it here at Centro.” This report is the product of a process of internal review and evaluation carried out by Centro staff and leadership in August 2009. It contains an overview of Latino demographics in Lane County with emphasis on the socio-economic profile of the target

population served by Centro, and describes the agency’s most successful programs. This report also highlights the most pressing needs of Centro clients, and proposes ways to better serve Centro clients in the future.

Latino Demographic Growth in Lane County

In the 1970s, Latino residents constituted less than .25 percent of the population in urban Lane County, and less than .10 percent in rural areas of the county (Lane Council of Governments 1973:11). Nonetheless visionary activist Chicano students from Lane Community College and the University of Oregon joined efforts to form a bilingual and bicultural social service organization that would meet the needs of newly arrived *Mexicano* immigrant families. The center created by these socially concerned and politically involved Mexican American students proved to be a successful idea that anticipated the local impact of future demographic trends. In the next three decades many more Latinos settled in Lane County, particularly around the Eugene-Springfield Metropolitan Statistical Area (see Figure 1 below).

Figure 1: Hispanic Population as Percentage of Total Population in Eugene, Springfield, and Eugene-Springfield Metropolitan Statistical Area, 1980 to 2000



Source: Eugene-Springfield Consolidated Plan 2005, p. 17.

Centro’s staff and its services evolved along with the unprecedented increase in the number of Latino residents that settled in the county. Centro became a community-based organization led and staffed by mostly first and second generation immigrants who continue to serve the needs of Latino families in Lane County. According to 2007 U.S. Census estimates, Latinos represent 5.9 percent of the county’s population (19,971 people; see Table 1 below).

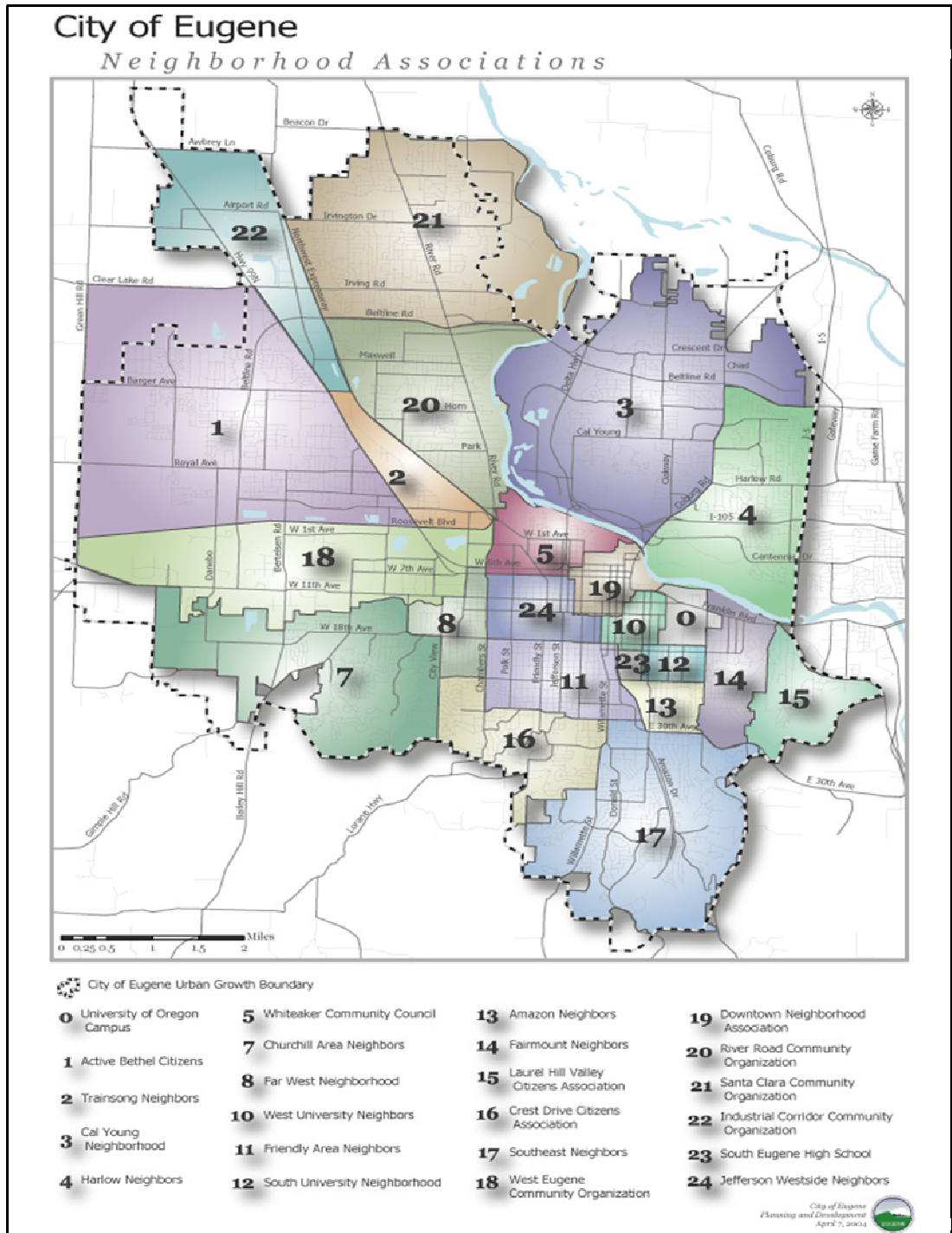
Table 1: Latino Population in Lane County, Oregon, and the Cities of Eugene and Springfield, 2005-2007

	Total Population	Latino Population (percentage of total)
Lane County	339,869	19,971 (5.9 %)
Eugene	150,430	9,799 (6.5 %)
Springfield	55,536	4,851 (8.7 %)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2005-2007 American Community Survey

Centro has become a gathering point for Latino families at the core of the Whiteaker neighborhood in Eugene—an area just west of downtown that has long been a home to artists' studios, funky bars, and popular cafés, bakeries, food stores, and ethnic restaurants—where more than 13 percent of the residents are Latino (Davis 2009; Whiteaker Community Council 2003:3). Other Latino families are clustered in North Eugene neighborhoods (Bethel, River Road, Santa Clara, Trainsong, and the Industrial Corridor Community), and in the neighboring city of Springfield (see Figure 2 below).

Figure 2: Neighborhoods of the City of Eugene



From 1990 to 2000, the Eugene-Springfield Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) experienced a more than 100 percent increase in the number of Hispanic¹ residents (Eugene-Springfield Consolidated Plan 2005:16). The Environmental Research Systems Institute estimated that residents of Hispanic origin would make up 8.0 percent of the population in Eugene-Springfield MSA in 2009—a demographic percentage already surpassed by the City of Springfield. Although all the social service agencies that we contacted for another project in Springfield (Mendoza et al., 2009) already have bilingual capacity to serve Spanish-speaking clients, language and cultural barriers continue to be an issue for service providers who want to reach out to the Latino population, particularly in Eugene. The need for adequate, affordable, and accessible housing for Latinos also continues to be a significant concern (Eugene-Springfield Consolidated Plan 2005).

Socioeconomic Profile of Centro LatinoAmericano Clients

Centro serves primarily Spanish-speaking residents who self-identify as Latino. Centro clients have very distinctive socioeconomic and demographic characteristics. They are mostly working-age (25 to 45 year old) immigrants with individual incomes that situate them and their families at or below poverty level. The average income of Centro's male clients is about \$1200 per month, while female clients may earn between \$500 and \$700 per month. Thus the average annual income of families (composed of two parents and two or three children) who receive services at Centro ranges from \$15,000 to \$22,000. According to the U.S. Census, in Lane County more Latino households are impoverished than those of any other population group (see Table 2 below). The situation of these families is even more challenging when they are headed by single mothers.

¹ In this report we use Latino and Hispanic interchangeably. Although we prefer the term “Latino,” other sources use “Hispanic” in reference to the same population.

Table 2: Poverty Status of Latino Families in Lane County, Oregon, in the past 12 months, 2005-2007

Families in Lane County	Total	Percent Below Poverty level
All families	83,932	
With related children under 18 years	38,471	
Race and Latino Origin of Families		
Families with a householder who is Latino	4,026	28.1%
White alone, not Latino origin	74,936	8.5%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau Table S 1702, 2005-2007 American Community Survey

Centro clients also are generally foreign-born immigrants who are non-citizens of our country; speak Spanish at home, and have less than high school education. They are employed in low-wage occupations with low prestige or status that offer little job security and no health insurance. The most common occupations of Centro clients are in agriculture, construction, forestry, hotels, restaurants, and private house-keeping. These are frequently described as “3D jobs”— that is “dirty, dangerous, or difficult.” Recent immigrants are often linguistically and culturally isolated from the larger community, and are less inclined to walk into a government agency to seek assistance. These immigrants gravitate toward providers who offer them trust and empathy. “It matters a lot to these people that we can serve them in Spanish,” said a case worker. She added: “While in other places they may feel rejected because of lack of bilingual capacity often paired with judgmental attitudes, we offer them compassion and understanding here at Centro; they do not get the sense that we are against them.” Thus Centro serves a very distinctive sector of the Latino population in Lane County composed of working-age residents who speak Spanish at home. The majority of the Spanish-speaking foreign-born older than 5 years of

age in Lane County are educated citizens with incomes that situate them in the middle-class, but some 30 percent of this population is composed by non-citizens who have less than high school education, and live in family households with annual incomes that situate them at or below poverty level (see Table 3 below). These characteristics define the profile of Centro clients. “Sometimes I cannot help them because they do not qualify for the program requirements, said a case-worker, but always ask if there is anything else I could help them with?” She added: “They share with me a bit of their history and aspirations, receive other referrals, and leave Centro with a feeling of hope, a little more hope that gives them strength to continue their efforts to integrate in our country.”

Finally, Centro clients are mostly of Mexican origin, although a few are originally from Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Peru, and other Latin American countries. While the large majority speaks Spanish at home, some are native speakers of an indigenous language. Most have been Lane County residents in the range of a few months to two or three years, although some clients currently served by the Crisis and Referrals program and the Jobs program settled in our county twenty or more years ago.

Table 3: Characteristics of People by Language Spoken at Home, Poverty, and Educational Attainment in Lane County, Oregon, 2005-2007

Total Population in Lane County		Population that Speak Spanish at Home
Total population 5 years and over	321,922	18,306
Foreign-born population 5 years and over		
(percentage)	6.4%	36.8%
Naturalized U.S. citizen	2.3%	7.1%
Not U.S. citizen	4.1%	29.6%
Poverty Status in the past 12 months		
Population 5 years and over for whom poverty status is determined	311,812	17,783
Below poverty level (percentage)	15.5%	29.8%
At or above poverty level (percent.)	84.5%	70.2%
Educational Attainment		
Population 25 years and over	230,576	10,727
Less than high school graduate (percent.)	10.7%	30.9%
High school graduate (includes equivalency)	26.6%	22.0%
Some college or associate's degree	35.1%	21.3%
Bachelor's degree or higher	27.6%	25.8%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau Table S 1603, 2005-2007 American Community Survey.

Programs and Initiatives

Centro currently offers a number of programs and initiatives that are funded by different sources. As Centro does not advertise its services, all prospective clients learn about Centro through word-of-mouth. People access these services through phone calls or

walk-in visits during regular office hours.² For example, each week during the month of August, 2009, Centro's receptionist answered an average of 125 inquiries over the phone per week, and each week an average 110 people walked-in to the reception to inquire about or to actually receive services. Centro personnel are able to offer valuable bilingual and bicultural services to Spanish-speaking individuals and families thanks to the generous support of the Lane County Department of Health and Human Services, United Way, and Saint Vincent de Paul. These funders' continued support makes possible for Centro staff and volunteers to reach out to people through the following programs and initiatives:

Programs

- Crisis and Referrals
- Jobs
- "Los Niños" (the children)
- Transitional Housing
- Counseling for Alcohol and Drug Addictions.

Partnerships

The agency also partners with Food for Lane County, Women's Space, Lane Transit District (LTD), the Housing and Community Agency of Lane County, Department of Human Services, Migrant Education, Catholic Community Services, Oregon Toxics Alliance, University of Oregon Moss Childcare Center, and City of Eugene Recreation Services to serve children and families.

Other Services

- English as Second Language classes taught free of charge in the mornings and evenings by committed volunteers
- Consultation with registered nurses about breastfeeding, health and nutrition of well-children
- Annual assistance with tax preparation from February to mid-April free of charge also by committed volunteers
- A weekly play group for children 0 to 5 years of age

² Centro is open Monday through Thursday from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm, and Friday from 8:00 am to 12:00 noon.

- A weekly school-age boys' group
- Translation and interpreting services (English and Spanish).

Initiatives Starting in 2009

In fall 2009 Centro is scheduled to start offering the following:

- citizenship classes (Centro staff is currently certified by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service to offer these classes)
- A month-long workshop on "College Readiness" for Latino high school juniors and seniors and their families
- A health and nutrition seminar funded by United Way
- Computer literacy classes (made possible by a generous donation of the University of Oregon Surplus Warehouse)
- Spanish and Portuguese classes for non-native speakers
- A women's empowerment group.

Except for the language classes, these initiatives will be offered in Spanish.

Description of Programs

Crisis and Referral Services

This program provides quick and focused intervention for individuals who are immersed in a critical situation or have a particularly pressing need at the moment, such as scheduling medical appointments, or scheduling consultations with immigration or labor lawyers. The clients may need translation for power of attorney forms, birth certificates or marriage licenses. They may have to fill out job applications that they find difficult to understand. They may require advice to adjudicate life insurance benefits. They may be tenants in need of assistance in contacting landlords to make claims, mortgage lenders to renegotiate agreements, or auto-insurance companies to report a traffic accident. Clients in critical situations may have also become recently unemployed or be at serious risk of becoming homeless because they cannot make mortgage payments or pay rent. They are generally young or middle-age men and women who support families either in Lane County or in their countries of origin. Most live in Eugene and Springfield. The staff person who

provides this referral service currently sees about five clients per day, but could potentially serve more clients if she were employed full-time for the program.

“My clients are worried and scared, said the case worker, they want to solve their problem quickly and won’t talk much about other things, but if during the intake I suspect a case of domestic violence for example, I refer them to Women’s Space because this agency specializes with this type of issue and we don’t.” “I would like to have more funds to create a better structure for crisis intervention and offer more services,” said the case worker. “Here at Centro we don’t have much money to provide direct assistance, and the help that we offer is limited. For a case worker this is frustrating—I never imagined that the work would be like that—you want to help but without funding you can only go so far.” Usually Crisis and Referrals’ clients receive a one-time intervention and may not be seen again for a while. One case worker described an individual she worked with who sought Centro’s assistance:

“Several months ago I saw a client who lives alone in Eugene. He suffered a stroke that left him almost blind in one eye and (he) is losing sight in the other eye. My client cannot apply for any assistance because he lost (or was robbed) of his green card, and has no money or stamina to go to Portland to apply for a new one. Since he first came to see me, I’ve been in contact with a foundation in Portland that pays for eye exams and surgeries for the poor to try to get medical attention for his problem, and last week finally my client has received approval to undergo an eye examination here in Eugene and even surgery if needed. He is delighted with this good news! I believe that if a case worker has the will and interest to help people out, she can accomplish it.”

Staff in charge of crisis intervention often refers clients to other Centro programs such as Jobs, Alcohol and Drug counseling, transitional housing assistance, activities for women and children, and English as Second Language classes.

Los Niños (Children’s) Program

This program serves children from newborn to 18 years, and their families. Children are typically American-born with one or both parents who are foreign-born. Two case workers are directly involved with *Los Niños* and serve about 50 clients per month, but each one could easily double the number of intakes with additional funding for this program. The case workers see almost an equal number of women and men— because

wives are more comfortable coming to appointments with their spouses, the case-workers say.

Most clients are young married couples with one to three children (rarely more than five children) who are sharing living quarters with friends or relatives. About a quarter of Centro clients are home owners. “If they have financial difficulties and cannot pay their mortgages, we refer them to NETCO,” said a case worker. Last year about one-third of the clients in this program had recently moved to Eugene from California, Arizona, or other states, but this year most families are long-term Eugene and Springfield residents—occasionally they also come from Junction City, Creswell, Cottage Grove, and Florence. Some families are being forced to separate because there are no jobs available to parents for supporting the children. Typically the husband stays in Lane County and the wife and children return to the parents’ country of origin. “If the children are older, I can easily see that they are unhappy with the decision of going back,” said a case-worker.

Los Niños case workers examine the situation of families, review their income level, and may recommend applying for food stamps for the American-born children or refer parents to Centro’s food boxes program (carried out in conjunction with Food for Lane County). The children may be referred to (a) the local Department of Human Services, (b) to Centro’s play group³ for children from 6 months to 5 years old, (c) volunteer nurses who see children aged 0 to 3 at Centro, and (d) Centro’s summer camp funded by the City of Eugene Recreation Services⁴. These families also receive school supplies donated to Centro by generous supporters at the start of the school year. During Thanksgiving, the families receive baskets also donated by supporters. At Christmas, the children receive toys collected by Centro staff during an annual toy drive. In reviewing each family’s financial situation, the case-workers advise them on applying common sense budgeting strategies, and also give them money-saving tips.

The goal of the program is not only to assist its clients but also promote the families’ self sufficiency. “Centro is the agency that most of our clients trust,” said a case worker

³ The play group meets once a week. Participants receive diapers and a snack, thanks to the generous support of a group of physicians at Peace Health.

⁴ Latino children in 2nd, 3rd and 5th grade participate in a summer camp together with children attending the UO Moss Daycare Center, once a week during a 6-week period in the summer.

directly involved with the program, “but we are limited in the number of services that we offer due to lack of funding. I wish we could offer more in the future so our clients continue to trust us.” For example, this case worker said, “I have a client who speaks an indigenous language and barely understands Spanish, something which makes every interaction more difficult for her. She has five children and lost her job in mid-December. I knew that she wouldn’t be able to buy gifts for her children and we had already distributed toys. I called Salvation Army to enroll her in a program that offers Christmas dinner and toys for low-income families, but she had to go there and fill out an application. So I rescheduled my time at Centro to be able to take this mother to the Salvation Army offices to apply for dinner and toys for her children. I knew that she wouldn’t be able to do it by herself due to linguistic and cultural barriers.”

Commenting on success stories of *Los Niños*, Centro’s receptionist mentioned that recently a case worker helped a single mother by making a phone call to an attorney’s office and explaining the difficult situation in which this woman found herself. The case-worker was able to get a reduction in the attorney’s fee—everyone involved considered it a true achievement. Another time a case worker helped a mother whose son had been involved in a car accident, and this woman called the local Spanish-language radio station to publicly thank Centro’s staff.

Jobs Program

The Jobs program helps clients who need to fill out job applications, write résumés, and review on-line job openings advertised throughout Lane County. It also provides a safe place for day laborers who are looking for a day’s job. Centro serves about 100 male day laborers per week. Case workers ensure that employers follow the law when hiring these workers for temporary, short-term jobs. Few female clients (an estimated 20 per month) come to Centro seeking assistance from this program. Those who come to Centro seeking day labor opportunities are generally recent immigrants with weak social networks and few contacts in the community.

These workers are mostly Spanish-speakers but “about one in ten speaks an indigenous language, often from Guatemala,” said a case-worker directly involved with the program. He added, “About a quarter of them speak enough English to understand

instructions at the workplace; about one in twenty has completed college education in the country of origin. For example, a guy was a sales executive in Mexico but here was doing landscaping for 10 dollars per hour; another guy was an electrician in his country of origin but couldn't get a license here." Many of these clients live in the Whiteaker neighborhood. They walk or bike to Centro in the morning, and wait for employers at the street corner during weekends.

Centro's case-workers talk to these clients when they come for services and advise them to learn English. Participants in the jobs program often learn from one another; said a case worker, "When they are waiting for employers, they keep having conversations about life in the U.S. and the most educated person among them usually leads the discussion." Single men who are new to the U.S. and bewildered by the challenge of creating a life here as well as socially isolated may develop some dependence on alcohol. Centro's case workers may refer them to Alcohol and Drug addiction counseling, to English as Second Language classes, and to low-cost housing opportunities advertised in Centro's bulletin boards. They typically are served by the Jobs program for about two or three months. Some are able to make connections with employers who then call them regularly and directly, without relying on Centro as a liaison. One client started his own painting business thanks to the support of a former employer.

The recession appears to have affected disproportionately Centro Job's program participants. This program peaked between December 2006 and June 2007, when it was receiving requests to fill openings in agriculture (harvesting fruit, vegetables, and also grapes in small vineyards). Female clients come to Centro looking mostly for housekeeping referrals, and last year Holiday Inn hired six clients to work at a newly opened facility in Springfield. But last year, very few employers called Centro to request workers, and this year almost no one called Centro. As one case worker explained, a growing number of individuals are now seeking what used to be jobs held only by recent immigrants. The one employer who did call Centro this year, a grower in Albany, needed eight workers to pick corn. He received 300 applications. "Restaurants in the neighborhood used to call Centro to advertise vacancies but now they receive hundreds of applications for one dishwasher position," said a case-worker.

Transitional Housing Program

The transitional housing program helps out Latino families in the community who find themselves homeless. This is part of a larger program funded by Saint Vincent de Paul. A case worker devotes twenty hours per week to serve six families enrolled in this program. She does home visits with the families on a weekly basis, and also enrolls them in counseling sessions, and in money management classes with the goal of becoming self-sufficient again. The families are staggered during the course of two years, after which they graduate and other families are admitted into the same program. There is a careful screening process for all of the applicants.

When families first come to Centro, they may be referred to Women's Space, Migrant Education, or Shelter Care. If they qualify, and are approved, there is usually a waiting period until housing becomes available. "I refer them to English as Second Language classes at Lane Community College," said the case worker, "and it seems to work out well. When I do home visits with mothers who are learning English, at the end of the second year I can conduct the visit entirely in English." Most clients are originally from Mexico but also from El Salvador and Peru. Most clients are young parents in their mid-twenties to early thirties, with two or three children. Some are single mothers who have experienced domestic violence. Generally clients in this program have been in the United States three to five years. Some moved to Lane County from big cities or from California. Initially they may have had a friend or relative who hosted them here but could not support them anymore as there were unable to find jobs.

The children are typically born in the United States, but the parents are foreign-born and have little grasp of the English language. They may have completed their education in Mexico and feel confident about the prospects for their children's future. "All my families are interested in sending their children to college," said the case-worker. "Being unemployed is hard for parents," she added, "it may trigger addictions and violence, while the kids are in school trying to get good grades in school. The father may feel that his role in the family is diminished because his wife is employed and is gradually more independent. However, I encourage parents not to instill a victim's mentality in their children."

Immigrant families may become homeless when parents lose their jobs, get ill (sometimes with mental illness), have weak social networks in the community that can

provide them with few options for temporary housing, or make poor planning decisions. Parents eligible for this program typically make between 900 and 1,200 dollars per month and have two young children. The case worker noted that families often need to be shown the important things to do to get ahead in our society and that, with time program participants can become self-sufficient and proud of their accomplishments. She added: “For example, a client called me the other day in panic; she had graduated into permanent housing at Saint Vincent de Paul and her kids had broken the glass in the back window. She valued so much what she had and didn’t want to be kicked out... so she paid \$350 to replace the window.” “Also one time I had a family who was able to buy a home at the end of their participation in the program but that is very rare,” she explained. At the conclusion of the program, most families actually transition into rental housing and none have returned to homelessness.

Even if families are not eligible for the Transitional Housing program, the case worker still tries to provide much-needed information and referrals to resources. “Sometimes I cannot help the families because they don’t have a Social Security number or have no children (required to be eligible for the program), but I give them a list of low-income apartments, listen attentively to their issues, and encourage them to learn English. I try to give them some hope; otherwise someone who is hopeless closes the door, becomes depressed, and stops looking for opportunities to get ahead.” She continued,

“We offer these things at Centro, a sense of support, trust, and understanding. They (Latino immigrant families) receive useful information and don’t feel that we are against them. What we do here at Centro actually helps the community at large because some Americans let cultural and linguistic barriers blind them, and are less compassionate. The Latino community is a huge piece of America and some people are tearing it down. We at Centro want to build immigrant families up. We help immigrants to take responsibility for their part in the community. We make them feel that we are in this together. We give them something in return and help them to create even more with the little they receive from us. If you give resources and information to our clients, they’ll feel empowered and will return it to you even more.”

Alcohol and Drug Addiction Counseling Program

The Alcohol and Drug (A & D) addictions program is licensed to give treatment to adults (18 years of age and older). It serves 40 to 70 clients per year. Most clients are immigrants born in Mexico and other Latin American countries, but a few are second generation Latinos. Among the foreign-born, some 70 percent are non-citizens. Most are men (less than 3 percent are women) who live in Eugene and Junction City, some live in Springfield. About 30 percent have less than 6th grade education, 60 percent have a 9th grade education and 10 percent completed high school. They are employed in low-wage jobs, such as restaurants, lumber companies, tree nurseries, vegetable farms, dairy farms, cleaning and maintenance services, or do lawn and yard work.

Although a few A & D clients own homes, the majority rent low-cost apartments or is homeless. Centro's counselor spends as much time as necessary in individual or group sessions with clients that may last from 8 weeks to 12 months. He works with each client to explore his individual situation and facilitate durable changes in their lives. Health care is generally an issue for these men. Many have never seen a physician in the United States. The counselor distributes Spanish language brochures on health care topics, and offers guidance on issues such as sexually transmitted diseases, cholesterol, and diabetes. Sometimes the clients have their first physical exam while they are in the program. For example, they may discover that they suffer from diabetes or hypertension. Due to the symptoms that the clients describe during the intake visit, the counselor may recommend they consult with a physician, although they usually do not have health insurance.

Centro clients receive counseling to treat their addictions but they also have the opportunity to talk about other areas of their lives that involve physical and psychological health. They may talk about how they began abusing alcohol or drugs, and in the process they become more aware of their current situation and evaluate the influence of the social and cultural environment in which they are immersed.

Each client starts with a 2-hour evaluation and diagnostic session where, together with the counselor, he or she identifies the main issues and receives a treatment plan. For example, a client may not value his relationship with his wife or may behave violently with his children. Thus the counselor explores how he could change those harmful behaviors. Use of alcohol and drugs typically intensifies destructive behaviors. Because most people

do not want to cause harm to others, the counselor explores so called “thinking errors.” He asks clients to include their spouses in their individual counseling.

The goal of the treatment is to solve the client’s problems, and enable him to make better choices in the future. Some clients do real and sustainable behavioral changes, and others do small but meaningful changes, depending on the extent of the addiction. For example, a client once shared with his counselor the following story: “My wife said ‘I want to tell you something ... I’m very happy because a long time has passed since you last got drunk.’ Now she could say that she was very happy because I don’t drink and am saving money and feel better.” Sometimes the clients come back to Centro to share with the counselor what are they doing to improve their lives or their spouses come to thank the counselor for her husband’s behavioral change.

Centro’s A & D program uses a bio-psycho-social model based on evidence-based practices so the clients can review their histories and analyze how history affects a person’s life and his commitment to change course. During the counseling sessions, the clients talk about things that are a problem for them now, and were also a problem in the past, and how they could change to get different results in the future. “I would like to have more funding to accept clients in the program for free or at a very low cost,” said the counselor. When an immigrant comes to Centro seeking addiction counseling, he or she is usually in a very difficult economic situation. They may have to suffer hunger and many inconveniences to be able to pay for their treatment because the option is often going to jail. “It affects me as a counselor,” said Basilio Sandoval, “because they have to pay rent, court expenses, and also counseling; many times they get angry at me (because they do not have enough money for all that they need).” He continued,

“I’m really passionate about this program because I’ve been doing treatments for the past 13 years. Working here at Centro has been the best thing that happened to me. I would like to help even more people. I work with people who are not doing well. They are fighting an internal tension to overcome their addictions. I wish I could tell them ‘O.K., I’ll change you, you’ll be well again,’ but it doesn’t work that way. The person needs to make an internal decision, a personal commitment to change. I tell them ‘if you do not want to change, go ahead with your life but if you do want to change, I can help you.’ The clients that Centro serves are at different stages of overcoming their addictions. Generally they are still not in control of their behavior and cannot decide what is best for them. Most people are in crisis and have a story to

tell. But many succeed and then we see them in the community as small business owners or employed in steady jobs. They may have also received rental assistance, food boxes, and useful referrals. When they get older, they may come back and say ‘I want to volunteer at Centro.’ ”

A staff person who assists the A & D counselor commented on the program: “I hope that Centro’s doors could remain open, that we could get more contracts and grants so we could continue helping our clients, so they trust that there is a place in Eugene where they will find people who speak Spanish as a first language. Although I know that there are other agencies with bilingual staff and many programs to treat alcohol and drug addiction, I think that our program is the best, honestly, because we treat people with dignity here.”

Examining the Needs of Centro Clients

In August 2009, Centro’s case workers conducted a survey of 115 clients who are currently receiving services in the agency. As part of the standard intake interview, each client was asked to respond to the following questions:

- What are your present needs?
- What other services would you like to find at Centro in the future?

A simple tabulation of all those responses resulted in the following ranking of the top five present needs among Centro clients:

A Latina Immigrant Story

I lived in Eugene for 20 years. The first five years, I wasn’t employed for wages but was raising young children. I took English as Second Language classes and had a tutor at home twice a week. To me that meant so much! To be able to speak to someone, that someone would talk to me and explain something to me...

When you are in a country where everything is so different, if someone pays attention to you, gives you one hour of his or her time to simply teach you something, like the English language which is so necessary, it means a lot to you.

At the beginning I felt that I wasn’t self-sufficient and didn’t have self-esteem because I couldn’t say “good morning” in English with confidence. When I started to learn more, I went to places like the Whiteaker Police Station and asked: “Where can I go to do this? Where can I go to do that?” They gave me answers. I thought to myself, even if I don’t know how to drive a car I could start learning how to bike. ..

When I first arrived, there was not a day in which I wouldn’t cry... That’s why I now want to help other immigrants. I want to ask them those questions: How are you doing? What is happening in your life? Do you miss your family? That gives them the incentive to talk ... they open up to you and start telling you their stories and making a connection that is beautiful and humane. You give them strength; they feel that they have dignity.

I wish everyone in this life would have the capacity to listen and support one another. That would be the most beautiful thing in the world!

1. **Unemployment: need assistance finding a job.**
2. **Healthcare: need access to affordable health care services.**
3. **Legal assistance: need access to affordable bilingual and bicultural legal assistance for immigration and other matters.**
4. **English as Second Language instruction: need access to free or low cost classes at different times of the day.**
5. **Affordable housing.**

When asked about services that Centro could offer in the future, the clients' responses included:

- ✓ Activities for older retired immigrants who have nobody else to talk with during the day and remain socially and linguistically isolated.
- ✓ A youth group.
- ✓ A women's group.
- ✓ Computer literacy classes.
- ✓ Citizenship classes.
- ✓ Child care for working mothers.
- ✓ A thrift store.

How Could Centro Better Serve Its Clients in the Future?

In-depth interviews with Centro staff resulted, not surprisingly, in suggestions for future programs that are very similar to those requested by the clients. Staff suggestions included the following:

- ✓ Having a **bilingual registered nurse** serving Centro clients on a weekly basis. Centro used to offer such a service in the past. A case-worker said: "Our clients do not have health insurance. I often refer them to River Stone Clinic and other clinics. It is important to have a small clinic at Centro again. In my view, this is the biggest need in the community."

“Some years ago I was an assistant to a nurse that saw patients at Centro,” said Emerita Iboa. “Up to 19 people would come on a first-come first-serve basis each morning. (They would be waiting in a line at We had to evaluate each case individually because the nurse could only see 9 patients. The same nurse would go to White Bird Clinic in the afternoon, and I had to refer them there or to a different clinic where they could be seen. On Fridays we would go to a clinic in Creswell. I did the intake, took the body temperature, checked for diabetes (through a urine analysis), filled out health forms with the patient’s information, ordered X rays or blood tests from Sacred Heart Hospital, called the pharmacy to ask for the patients’ prescriptions, double-checked the expiration date on medications, and so forth. The nurse even discovered breast cancer in four immigrant women. She did everything for them, from getting mammograms, to surgery and counseling. Even today I run into people that we served in the clinic and they call me: ‘*Hola doctora!*’ (Hello doctor) in a very respectful manner. These are people who come from rural areas, very small places in Mexico. They are very humble. They don’t know much about city life. I feel their respect and appreciation and it means a lot for me. I don’t earn much at Centro, and I’m not rich either but I do it for the people that we serve.”

- ✓ **Vocational training** or other training that would better prepare the clients to perform more qualified jobs, such as that of nurse assistant. “Clients would benefit from enrolling in some kind of class to improve their situation, improve their language skills, and adapt to this country,” said a case worker. Another case worker said, “There are not enough jobs in the market and people cannot pay the rent. I would love to put them on the path to get some type of training with a career oriented approach so they are not living day to day—something like teaching computer skills or training to start their own business.”

- ✓ **A program for youth** where they would receive all the support that they need to address identity issues and succeed in becoming part of this community without engaging in activities that are not permitted or beyond the rules.

“If I see youth acting as *cholo* or gang member wannabe, I know that they are at risk,” said a case-worker. “A youth program would support them in continuing their education, integrating to society, and avoid ending up in jail. I would like activities for youth at Centro, for everyone together, not only Latino youth. I would organize fun

activities that used taxpayers' money in creative ways to attract youth that are at risk of ending up in correctional services.”

- ✓ **A group for seniors**, older Latino clients who are very isolated. “Our clients won’t go to senior citizen centers,” said a case-worker, “but they could come to Centro to chat and play games, to share social activities with one another.”
- ✓ **Affordable housing for single mothers**. “I see single mothers who have not been victims of violence and don’t want to go to shelters,” said a case-worker, “(and) they have very few options for low-cost housing.”
- ✓ **Classes to adapt to American society and culture**. “People come full of illusions,” said a case-worker, “and they don’t know how the social and economic systems work. They get frustrated also because they don’t know how to speak the language, which makes everything more difficult. But it’s not only the language, it’s also the culture. I would organize movie sessions related to the troubles that they experience every day and would talk and discuss the content afterwards, like in a support group. Immigrants are generally afraid to talk but when they are in a group and someone starts talking, others will do it too.”

Contributing to the Integration of Latino Families in Lane County

Multicultural social policies are based on the idea that immigrants need special services to address their special needs with regard to education, language learning, housing, and more generally social and cultural integration. Multiculturalism acknowledges that maintenance of language and preservation of culture are not only constitutional rights for ethnic communities in democratic societies, but are also fundamentally necessary for an immigrant group to gain a foothold in the adopted country. Immigrants often teach the language of the country of origin to the second generation, organize festivals, and carry on public performances inspired in their native cultures. In most cases, language maintenance applies in the first two or three generations, after which

there is a rapid decline. The prevalence of cultural symbols, however, usually lasts much longer. Members of the majority population may see cultural difference as a threat to the nation's identity. Migrant languages and cultures become expressions of otherness and markers for discrimination. In the view of some citizens, immigrants should give their languages and cultures up in order to assimilate. Failure to do so is regarded as an indication of desire to remain separated. The alternative view is that ethnic communities need their own languages and cultures to develop identity and self-esteem. Cultural maintenance helps communities to gain collective strength which would, in turn assist community members in their integration to the larger society. Similarly bilingualism brings benefits in academic learning, social interaction, intellectual development, and ultimately mutual understanding, and strong sense of belonging (Castles and Miller 2003, p. 234, 248).

As they have done for the past thirty years, staff, volunteers, and supporters at Centro LatinoAmericano continue to foster immigrant integration into the larger society of Lane County, Oregon. By serving Latino immigrants and their families, Centro also lessens the load for other social service agencies, and contributes to the successful incorporation of the second and third generations.

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“Many people benefit from the purpose of this agency ... from simple direct help (like interpreting or making a phone call) to receiving cash assistance,” said a case worker.

“We are providing education to an ethnic community, we support their healthy and satisfactory integration, so they can feel reassured that they are valued by who they are, and can become better members of this community.”

“Centro support first generation parents and second generation youth to integrate in this community in positive terms. We understand them and treat them with dignity because Latinos in Lane County (regardless of their immigration status) have the same needs and obligations as anyone else. They want to belong to our community, they want to contribute.”

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