

Para Los Niños (PLN)

Organizational mission/vision

From birth and beyond, “PLN supports and empowers the entire Latinx family through early learning, literacy and academic skills development, culturally relevant summer enrichment, and social justice parent leadership programs.” PLN programming is designed to support parents through holistic learning techniques and support that establishes their competence and confidence as their children’s first teachers. This model reinforces core values within the Latinx community through mutual growth by fostering individual talents ensuring no one is left behind.

What communities does the organization serve?

PLN supports low income Latinx immigrant and refugee children and families in South King County. Previously serving about 500 families a year, during the COVID pandemic they pivoted most of their programs to on-line platforms. PLN served over 2000 families by providing emergency food, rent support, essential items and provided gift cards to many families so they could apply the funds to meet their unique needs.

What does the organization do?

“PLN supports Latinx children and families through its core programs:

Aprendamos Juntos (Learning Together), its flagship afterschool program that improves the academic performance of low income Latino children while simultaneously supporting parents to build English literacy and develop leadership skills to advocate for their children's education; Descubriendo Nuestra Cultura (Discovering Our Culture) and Around the World, culturally-aligned summer education programs for low income Latinx children; PLN’s community organizing and advocacy work with Latinx parents includes the Leadership Academy, a year-long training and leadership development program that empowers Latinx immigrant parents with leadership and civic engagement skills; Padres Unidos, a monthly gathering of parents to help them build skills to navigate US educational systems; and the Parent Leadership Team, a long-term group that coordinates PLN families’ participation in advocacy and social change opportunities.

All together, PLN programs uplift young Latinx learners and increases Latinx parents’ ability to be strong advocates for their children’s health and education, and to support their young children’s development, positive identity, self-esteem, cultural pride, and the growth of the entire family”*.

How does the organization maintain proximity to the community it serves?

“The need for each of PLN’s programs was identified by deep community engagement with Latinx families themselves through surveys, parent leadership classes, family summits, and

one-on-one interviews. We then engaged Latino parents and youth to co-design each program in collaboration with community partners and stakeholders. In order to implement Para Los Niños' value of being a completely bilingual/bicultural organization that integrates Latin American culture throughout our organization, we intentionally recruit and develop leaders who are of, by and for our Latino immigrant community. PLN's theory of change says that we must foster deep relationships with and inspire ownership by the community we serve. We see respect for and maintenance of our language and culture as key to the healthy emotional and social development of Latinx children."* Their proven foundational programs allow them to have a trusted relationship with their community. Virginia and leadership are digging even deeper to serve their community and were quick to realize and respond on the profound impact that COVID would have on their community. Many in their community were front-line workers who were at high risk of contracting COVID and many others lost jobs. PLN created programs that allowed volunteers to receive a stipend for work such as sewing and creating face masks at the beginning of the pandemic and supporting vaccination efforts in their community most recently.

Describe the impact of an unrestricted grant for this organization.

PLN would use the grant over three years to help sustain its existing programs but the striking need they want to address with these resources is the physical and mental health of their community. Specifically, their goal is to address good health education and COVID vaccine hesitancy. They plan to accomplish that by training up to 10 "Health Promoters" through collaboration with the State Department of Health. The goal and impact for these newly skilled community members is to become trusted community resources for health promotion. They have witnessed the mental health toll on their community especially in the midst of the devastating COVID pandemic and plan to partner with a smaller focused non-profit, Puentes. The community is presently severely lacking Spanish-speaking mental health professionals. Virginia shared with passionate enthusiasm their collaborations to better meet their community's needs. The digital divide is significant, inequitable and wide in their community and the fissure widened in the pandemic. PLN wants to strengthen the programs they developed to address technology needs and also plan to recruit an additional staff person to serve as a resource person to address and guide people in need to receive information and direction on how to find and access available community services.

Describe how the organization affects individuals and systems:

- The 2020 Annual report provides an illustrative story of the capability of multi generational empowerment and learning via a testimonial from Gabriela González. Gabriela began volunteering and assisting with the PLN program "Let's Learn Together" where parents and children participate in classes to learn English. Over eight years she and her three children participated and benefited greatly. Her now adult son is attending

college and gives back by volunteering at Aprendamos Juntos - the PLN after school program. Gabriela was recruited into the Leadership Academy and states she has learned and grown so much personally that she now actively advocates for her community.

- The work PLN has done is proven yet pivoting and growing. They are building on their foundational core. PLN has always recognized the power of their community and partnerships to deliver on their mission. From inception they have had a partnership with Highline Public Schools. When PLN was first founded there were few, if any, bilingual staff in the district with all communication to parents provided only in English. Now communications are sent out in both Spanish and English and there are bilingual outreach workers from the Latinx community to engage with parents. Highline Public Schools committed funding, facilities and institutional support for the Aprendamos Juntos program which is still going strong after 16 years.

How does the organization's leadership and financial position reflect stability and capacity to execute its mission? The organization and its financial position has been stable and growing over the past five years, including growth in staffing (up from 5 to 9 over the past two years).

Of note were comments from the Executive Director at the end of our meeting where she expressed gratitude that Impact 100 was working to help smaller nonprofits as so many of them are focused on "doing the work" (the delivery of programs and services) that they often do not have the time or resources to be able to get their message out to the community. She shared that one such program is Puentes, an organization that provides mental health services to the Latinx community. She hopes to lift them up by partnering on programs to address mental health needs of the PLN community.

What are the compelling reasons for Impact 100 to partner with this organization?

PLN exemplifies the selection criteria and values that Impact 100 seeks in its nonprofit partners by addressing the fundamental needs of its community and as well as addressing root causes of inequitable treatment of Latinx children and families. It was created by and for members within its community to address unmet needs of children and parents with programs that create truly lasting transformative change from one generation to the next. Their reach and impact is even stronger as they foster an amazing network of collaborative partners.

*Quote from grant application