



Pilsen-Little Village Innovation Zone 2015 Outreach and Enrollment

The Pilsen and Little Village Innovation Zone (PLVIZ) is in the communities also known as the Lower West Side and South Lawndale on the near south side of Chicago. As of 2014, 69 percent of the 3,717 children in Pilsen and 82 percent of the 7,712 children in Little Village under the age of five live in low-income families. These communities have a significant Latino population in culture and language. Some of the families have undocumented members and some others are second-generation immigrants. Immigration and Custom Enforcement (ICE) raids are disrupting families of this Innovation Zone and calls for a considerate and well-planned approach to the community.

IDENTIFYING UNMET COMMUNITY NEEDS

The Pilsen-Little Village community is one of eleven Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Innovation Zones in Illinois, selected based on the level of concentrated need, presence of providers with a demonstrated interest in quality improvement, a history of collaboration and strong local support to strengthen early childhood systems and kindergarten readiness. The PLVIZ is addressing the following challenges within this community:

- Immigrant families experiencing poverty are often unaware of the early learning and development programs available to them.
- Families are often isolated by language and culture, and don't know how to access the available early learning programs for their young children.
- Children under the age of five who are living at or below the Federal Poverty Level in this Innovation Zone are under-represented in early learning and development programs, notably undocumented children and parents.

To determine effective strategies for connecting Latino parents with early childhood education programs, educators need to develop a greater understanding of the values of the Latino culture

that influence parents' childrearing and socialization practices, communication styles and their orientation toward formal education. Many of the cultural values that characterize Latino families underpin a strong family relationship. They have strong family ties, believe in family loyalty and operate from a collective orientation that supports community life. Latino families prefer a personalized style of interaction, a relaxed sense of time and need an informal atmosphere of communication.

FROM PARENT AMBASSADORS TO ENROLLMENT

The PLVIZ, eager to engage in the families' cultural practices of personalized interaction, recruited more than 50 Spanish-speaking Parent Ambassadors to participate in Parent Leadership Training. Of the 50 participating parents, seven became and remain the Pilsen-Little Village Parent Ambassadors. The Parent Ambassadors have been crucial to outreach and enrollment efforts; the face-to-face interaction with families builds trust and positive relations within the community, and is a fundamental element of working in the PLVIZ.

Parent Ambassadors attended events in April, May and June 2015, and conducted door-to-door canvassing (using a GIS map from Illinois Action for Children) to identify pockets of priority populations within the community. During these three months, the Parent Ambassadors spoke to

and collected information for future contact from more than 255 families. The PLVIZ created a central database to store and track the information the Parent Ambassadors collected about these families and children. Our Lady of Tepeyac Head Start Center, El Valor, Gads Hill, Chicago Commons,



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“Children in poverty areas should have the same education opportunities as kids whom are not. Because I feel this way, I am a supporter of increasing enrollment for these kids, I show support by working for IAFC and covering zones across Chicago”
 – Jeremy K.

YMCA Rauner Center, El Hogar del Nino signed MOUs to access all documents and contact information and began reaching out to these families directly.

During the next year, the PLVIZ used an iterative process to build a cohesive outreach and referral process with the goal of enrolling the 150 children whose information was collected into early learning programs. Many families were not able to be contacted because their phone was either disconnected or the phone number in the database was incorrect. The PLVIZ found that 13 percent of these children were already enrolled in early learning programs, which may have been the result of the information distributed by the Parent Ambassadors during their outreach in April, May and June.

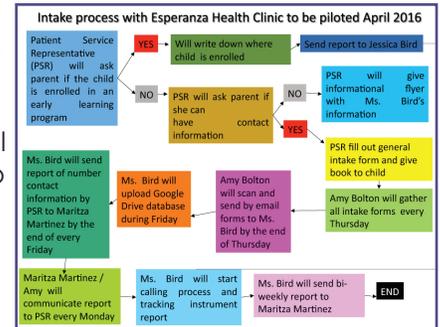
Many parents have reservations about and, therefore do not enroll their children in, early learning programs. In the Latino culture, research shows that trust and personalized interactions play an important role in the community. Families in the PLVIZ, many of which are undocumented, do not trust the government or the process of enrolling their children into early learning programs.

In February 2016, the PLVIZ hosted the first event in a “merienda-coffee” style to try to learn why families do not want to enroll their children in an early learning program and to increase the number of applications for enrollment. These events more deeply engage the Parent Ambassadors into the community. The Ambassadors share the concerns expressed by the participating parents’ with the PLVIZ team, which then adapts the outreach strategies based on this important feedback. The next learning cycle will aim to increase the number of applications to early learning programs in the PLVIZ.

BUILDING COMMUNITY

PARTNERSHIPS

To build trust with authorities in the community, as is custom in Latino culture, the PLVIZ will build relationships with a local health clinic and partner with them so the pediatric staff can refer parents they see, helping increase the enrollment of young children in early learning programs. Through this partnership, the PLVIZ will implement a referral process by collaborating with the clinic’s bilingual pediatricians to reach both English and Spanish speaking parents.



In addition, the PLVIZ is formalizing a plan for outreach activities at the Mexican Consulate, various churches in the Pilsen-Little Village community and the Little Village Chamber of Commerce. In these locations, the PLVIZ will place community resource tables with flyers and the community directory, and will ask people for their contact information to assist them in a personalized manner and in Spanish with the enrollment process. These partnerships will help alleviate the fear and anxiety experienced by many immigrant families who are not familiar with where and how to access early learning opportunities, while respecting and supporting the cultural customs of the Latino community.

ABOUT EARLY CHILDHOOD

INNOVATION ZONES

Illinois Action for Children supports each Innovation Zone in planning and implementing activities, while the Illinois Education Research Council will evaluate the success of the strategies chosen by each Zone. The Innovation Zone model uses action learning cycles, an iterative process, to quickly learn and adapt strategies for immediate use in each community. The federal Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge grant and local philanthropies provide funding.

www.actforchildren.org/for-providers/innovation-zones/



The Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge Innovation Zones initiative is a collaboration between the Governor’s Office of Early Childhood Development and Illinois Action for Children.

