



EL CENTRO DE LA RAZA

CHILDREN DO WELL WHEN THEIR FAMILIES
DO WELL, AND FAMILIES DO BETTER WHEN
THEY LIVE IN SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITIES

2006 FAMILY STRENGTHENING AWARDS

BUILDING A SENSE OF EMPOWERMENT

For 33 years, thousands of Latino families have turned to Seattle's El Centro de la Raza for support. Those who were homeless could always find the basics—a roof over their heads, food for their children and help to find a decent job. But when families now complete the organization's yearlong Homeless Assistance Case Management Program, they learn more than just how to survive—they gain the strength and skills to successfully negotiate the challenges ahead.

"El Centro de la Raza offers families a sense of community and extended family," says Associate Director Estela Ortega. "We look on these parents and children as if they were family members and ask, 'What would we want for our own family? What resources do they need to succeed?' We've always operated from that vantage point."



TO STABILIZE A FAMILY IS MORE THAN JUST TAKING A FAMILY, REFERRING THEM HERE AND THERE, AND PAYING FOR THE FIRST AND LAST MONTH'S RENT. YOU NEED TO INVOLVE THEM IN THE COMMUNITY AND BUILD A SENSE OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT.

—Roberto Maestas, Executive Director, El Centro de la Raza

OFFERING A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH

El Centro de la Raza's Homeless Assistance Case Management Program, unique in King County, links homeless families to educational and social services, such as classes in English as a Second Language (ESL) and American citizenship, financial education, and job skills, and after-school mentoring and tutoring. Families also gain confidence and a sense of community as they learn side-by-side with other families working toward better lives for their children.

Bilingual staff members help to break down potential cultural barriers that can prevent homeless families from achieving stability. "Many of our staff are Latinos who practice the culture and speak the language, and people relate to that," Ortega says.

At the heart of the program is a belief in homeownership as a means of strengthening families; all participants are required to take a five-hour, first-time homebuyers' course. "They may not be able to buy a home now, but everyone should have a vision of owning a home," Ortega says.

El Centro's results back its vision. In 2005, all families developed a long-term plan for stability and moved into permanent housing, and nearly all increased household wages.

El Centro de la Raza also measures success by the long-term relationships it builds with families. Many return to mark seminal moments. "People could have their weddings and birthday parties elsewhere, but they come back because they feel safe here," Ortega says.

FAMILIES COUNT FAMILY STRENGTHENING AWARDS

Through a joint venture of the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the National Council of La Raza (NCLR), the FAMILIES COUNT Family Strengthening Awards recognize NCLR Affiliates with outstanding programs that work to give children what they need most—strong, capable and economically successful families. Responding to the varied needs of the families they serve, these organizations improve the economic prospects of working men and women and create the services and networks of support that all families need to realize their aspirations for themselves and their children.

El Centro de la Raza demonstrates the partnership that the Affiliates of the National Council of La Raza (NCLR) form with Latino families. Nationally, nearly 300 of these organizations provide community and workforce development, education, social services, immigration, citizenship and other services. Collectively, the Affiliates serve millions of Hispanic Americans and immigrant families. “Day in and day out, our Affiliates work to strengthen families and communities,” says Janet Murguía, President and CEO of NCLR. “Together, we are creating more opportunities for Latino parents to build a better future for themselves and their children.”

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Award-winning Program:

Homeless Assistance Case Management Program

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