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Power and Resilience: One Stop Career Center of Puerto Rico

The history of Puerto Rico has been shaped by its geographic location, abundant natural resources, diverse cultural richness, and complex political status. In just the past decade, the island has faced many natural disasters (catastrophic hurricanes and earthquakes) and man-made challenges (a long-standing debt crisis, which has led to austerity measures, high unemployment rates, limited economic growth, and population outflow).

But whatever the challenge, Puerto Rico flourishes because of its people and their power and resilience.

Carmen Cosme, Founder & Executive Director at One Stop Career Center (OSCC), understood the need for an organization that could holistically address the diverse social and economic needs of Puerto Rican residents. With this vision, over the past twenty-three years, Carmen and her team have built OSCC into a dynamic and comprehensive social service and economic development organization.

The core mission of the One Stop Career Center of Puerto Rico is to connect Puerto Ricans with the tools, resources, and opportunities they need to improve the quality of their life and the lives of their families.

Today, OSCC offers a continuum of innovative and highly impactful services and programs to address the social and economic needs of Puerto Ricans — especially those who have been impacted by incarceration, homelessness, poverty, a lack of educational opportunity, and trauma.

In 2016, OSCC became an Affiliate of UnidosUS. This partnership has provided OSCC with resources and opportunities to grow and deepen its impact, including connecting with funders, elected officials, and the U.S. Secretary of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Since then, OSCC has been a key partner to UUS in other critical areas of work, including financial empowerment, youth development, and workforce development.

The services offered by the OSCC are always focused on helping people take agency over decisions impacting themselves and their families. Services and programs such as:

Housing Counseling Agency: Even before Hurricane Maria, affordable housing was a major issue for the island's residents. The Hurricane, however, damaged 60% of the occupied housing in Puerto Rico. Reconstruction, especially for the poor, has been painfully slow in recent years due to arbitrary and illogical funding policies. Also, rents have soared thanks to incentives offered to remote workers to relocate. As a consequence, many Puerto Ricans desperately need layers of support to improve their housing conditions. OSCC offers legal support and housing counseling, seeking to rebuild neighborhoods by helping families and landlords responsibly fulfill the responsibilities of tenancy or homeownership.

Through OSCC's housing program alone and under UnidosUS's HUD Intermediary grant, OSCC has provided housing education and counseling to approximately 15,000 clients. In the aftermath of the hurricanes, OSCC, which is one of only six housing counseling agencies on the island, became a strong advocate for the integration of local housing counseling agencies into the development of the Community Development Block Grant Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) action plan and ensuring housing counseling would be prioritized as a main activity of the disaster relief and recovery efforts.

Transitional and Post-Incarceration Reentry Program: Since 2000, OSCC has helped approximately 14,000 ex-offenders find meaningful employment and rebuild their lives. OSCC's participants have an 85% rate of successful job placement and a recidivism rate of approximately 12%, significantly contrasting to an average 76.6% recidivism rate across 30 states. OSCC provides clients with comprehensive services, including job readiness, job placement, and job retention, individual and group career counseling, remedial and personal development services, mentoring, parenting, health prevention, and follow-up assessments. The goal is to empower our clients to be successful in their families and their community, attributes that have proven to lower recidivism rates.

Job Placement and Career Counseling: OSCC offers personalized assistance to job seekers, providing guidance on resume writing, interview preparation, and job search strategies. Career counselors work closely with individuals to match their skills and aspirations with suitable employment opportunities, ultimately leading to greater job satisfaction and long-term success.

Skills Development and Training: Recognizing the importance of continuous learning and workforce development, OSCC offers a range of training programs designed to enhance the employability of our clients. These programs cover a diverse array of fields, including technical skills, soft skills development, entrepreneurship, and numerous industry-specific certifications. By equipping individuals with the necessary skills and then making sure that clients' skills evolve as needs evolve, OSCC contributes to the growth of a skilled and adaptable workforce.

Business Support and Employer Services: OSCC actively collaborates with local businesses and employers to understand their workforce needs. The organization assists businesses in talent recruitment, screening, and training, facilitating a seamless match between employers and skilled candidates. They focus, in particular, on training and placing individuals from sensitive communities with good-paying, dignifying work. By fostering strong relationships between employers and job seekers, OSCC promotes economic inclusiveness, family and community development and reduces unemployment rates.

Youth Development and Education Initiatives: More than half of the children in Puerto Rico live under the poverty line. Youth unemployment rates are double that of adults on the island. The children of Puerto Rico also have the unique challenges of living with the impact and the threat of destructive hurricanes. Throughout its history, the OSCC has invested in youth development programs and partnerships with local educational institutions. These initiatives provide career exploration opportunities, mentorship programs, internships, and scholarships, preparing young individuals for successful careers and empowering them to contribute to their families and their communities' social and economic growth.

The One Stop Career Center of Puerto Rico is a vital institution that serves as a catalyst for economic growth, workforce development, and individual empowerment. Through its comprehensive programs and services, the center has helped transform lives, strengthen businesses, and contribute to the overall prosperity of Puerto Rico. Continued support for the One Stop Career Center will ensure its sustainability and enable it to make an even greater impact in the years to come.