

RISE PARTNERSHIP IN ACTION

ACLAMO Family Centers



Overview

ACLAMO Family Centers is a nonprofit organization that provides comprehensive education, health and wellness, and social services to Latino, Spanish-speaking, and low-income residents of Montgomery County, Pennsylvania. ACLAMO has been a staple in the community since 1977, but the organization has transformed itself in recent years with a new strategic plan, a team that has doubled in size, and more structured programming.

ACLAMO is further enhancing its impact as one of 15 organizations selected to participate in the RISE Partnership's "Implementation" phase.



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Beatriz Gasiba, Senior Director of Programs
ACLAMO Family Centers

"One of my passions is impact, but it was challenging in the beginning to try to measure impact when the program was struggling," says Executive Director and CEO Nelly Jimenez, who joined ACLAMO in 2015. "We applied to RISE because we felt like 'okay, now we're ready,' we could start doing this and learn and have the support that we needed from RISE."

Beatriz Gasiba, senior director of programs at ACLAMO, works closely with a RISE consultant, Vivian Figueredo, on developing objectives and strategies for measuring outcomes and impact to improve programs. "We talk about the challenges we are facing and how we can measure outcomes in a better way," says Gasiba, who oversees the organization's educational programs. "We are trying to implement systems to help our lead teachers and staff, and measure outcomes in a way that's easier for all of us."

The RISE Partnership has been a source of growth and discovery, but also accountability. "I'm not going to lie, sometimes it's challenging," adds Jimenez. "It keeps us real, keeps us accountable to keep thinking on an

ongoing basis about developing the models to improve our program."

Navigating the COVID-19 pandemic has been difficult for ACLAMO, which serves an almost exclusively Latino community – a community disproportionately affected by the pandemic. The RISE Partnership has helped.

"When you're handling crisis after crisis, sometimes it's hard to stop and think: 'wait, why are we doing this again, why are we tracking this?' It's hard to get out of your comfort zone, your box," explains Jimenez. "It's a great opportunity to have someone from the outside, who sees it in a different way, challenge you and help you rethink and reflect: 'maybe I need to change that or maybe this is not working or maybe, yes, we're doing awesome.'"

When the pandemic hit, it quickly became clear that ACLAMO would need to alter how they deliver their education services and measure their success.

"We needed to change and shift how we were measuring outcomes in ways that were more realistic for the pandemic," Jimenez says. "This change wasn't

chosen by us but by the environment that we are in.”

ACLAMO is committed to basic needs like food, housing, and safety, but the pandemic created new urgency around issues of access to technology. “Our families didn’t have email accounts, they didn’t know what Zoom was... 80% of our families had no computers at home, no internet,” explains Jimenez. “So, yes, we’re going to make sure that people are eating, but we also need to make sure that everybody has access to the internet because internet is education.”

ACLAMO moved quickly to get their families devices, email accounts, and internet access, and these became among the types of new outcomes they started to measure. By summer, 68% of families said they had received help to create an e-mail account, Zoom account, or get internet access. 83% of families said that they have a least one device, such as a computer, tablet, or smart phone.

In addition to making necessary changes to better serve their families and students, ACLAMO also looked inward at their own staff – the people serving the community.

“We have tried to help and protect and

empower our clients, but what about our staff? Can we offer better benefits, can we offer better support? When we talk about impact, we have never included them,” says Jimenez.

So ACLAMO made big changes. They switched insurance companies so they could provide better benefits. They raised money to avoid layoffs. Some staff even got raises. And as an organization run mostly by women, they started offering more schedule flexibility; training and professional development; conducting more wellness checks; and asking for more feedback.

“Social justice starts at home, and that’s what we want to do,” says Jimenez. “We cannot talk about social justice for our clients if we don’t internally talk about social justice for our staff.”

Jimenez and Gasiba are now developing a 365-evaluation tool to evaluate not only their program, but their staff and their performance and the work as a team.

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Established in 2018, The RISE (Readiness, Implementation, Sustainability for Effectiveness) Partnership supports promising Greater Philadelphia and Southern New Jersey nonprofit organizations. The RISE Partnership Evaluation Funders Learning Community is the first convening supported by a network of funders in the region. The Learning Community is a collaborative effort with the Barra Foundation, Campbell Soup Company, Horner Foundation, Nelson Foundation, Philadelphia Foundation, PropelNext/Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, Scattergood Foundation, and United Way of Greater Philadelphia and Southern New Jersey, and a partnership with YaleEVAL of The Consultation Center at Yale. The Partnership provides nonprofits with resources and training to strengthen organizational effectiveness and ensure a greater impact on social, economic, health, and educational conditions in communities, including the effects of racism, intergenerational poverty and trauma.

For more information visit therisepartnership.org

