ACTIVATING THE VILLAGE

A culturally-responsive approach to place-based aging for the Latino community of Colorado
INTRODUCTION

Latino Age Wave Colorado (LAWC) was designed to improve the lives of Latino older adults and their caregiving families so they may thrive in community. An active program from 2011 to 2020, LAWC built upon the cultural strength of family to employ a family-centered approach to aging where all members of the family are considered caregivers and in need of appropriate resources and supports in caring for their older relative.

LAWC was launched in October 2011 in response to national research by Hispanics in Philanthropy projecting a “wave” of Latinos entering la tercera edad (third stage of life), with national numbers expected to rise 224 percent by 2030. This research also identified a unique set of needs and challenges for this growing population. Through a partnership between Hispanics in Philanthropy, Rose Community Foundation and the Latino Community Foundation of Colorado (LCFC), the Metro Denver area was selected as one of two locations to further explore implications for Latino older adults in Colorado.

Within its multi-year history, LAWC created greater awareness about the breadth of Latino aging across Colorado as well as implemented a community-based project in Denver's Montbello community to understand the depth of the challenges and opportunities. It is this work in Montbello and the development of the Conectoras de Montbello team which has drawn local, statewide and national attention for its place-based, culturally responsive approach. Built from the ground up, the program works in partnership with Latino older adults, local leadership, care providers and policy partners to create a community-centric care network, increasing access to available services. Latino Age Wave Colorado was sunset at the end of 2020, but continues to serve the community of Montbello through the Conectoras of Montbello, who have launched as an independent organization.

Through the years, the LAWC team was often asked, “How did you do it?” This report is their response. It is intended to share lessons learned and promising practices that may be helpful for individuals, communities and organizations seeking to create authentic and responsive programs and services.

As foundation leaders, we know how unique it is to have achieved a high level of culturally relevant success within a program that necessarily evolved and grew over time, and eventually led to the successful launch of an independent organization. We ask you to learn with us through this document, and think about the ways other foundations and similar organizations can put power in the hands of community.

Sincerely,

THE LATINO AGE WAVE COLORADO TEAM:
Conectoras de Montbello, Latino Community Foundation of Colorado, and Rose Community Foundation
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Latino Age Wave Colorado (LAWC) team would like to thank the following people and organizations for their partnership:

A Little Help
Alzheimer’s Association Colorado Chapter
Colorado Gerontological Association
Colorado Language Cooperative
Community Democracy Workshop
Denver City Councilwoman Stacy Gilmore, Office of
Denver Regional Council of Governments' Latino Case Management Team
Hilda Gehrke
Mile High Health Alliance
Montbello Walks
Northeast Transportations Connections
University of Colorado’s School of Dental Medicine
Village at Gateway Apartments
Volunteers of America's Montbello Manor

A special acknowledgement to LAW, funders, past and present:
Colorado Health Foundation
Next50 Initiative
Rose Community Foundation

The team also thanks Therese Ellery of Rose Community Foundation for her long-term investment and support of LAW, Mujer, Fuerza y Sentimiento for opening the door to the Montbello community and to Maricruz Herrera for knocking.
MEET THE TEAM

Conectoras de Montbello

AURELIO AVALOS-SNIDER
Aurelio enjoys connecting people to resources and service providers and making sure that they speak Spanish once connected. Spending time at events and holiday celebrations allows him to make things special for people. He is inspired by bringing joy to his community and offering a sense of family. Everything that he and the team do is for the community they serve.

MARIA CORONADO
Maria schedules monthly activities for Latino older adult community members and loves running them and participating herself. She is inspired to work on the project because she is passionate about working with older adults. She is proud that the project has given people a sense of family and that Latino older adults are not alone. She continues to identify people's needs and fight for their rights.

ROSARIO MENDOZA
Rosario manages monthly activities for community members. She is inspired by the connections she has made in the community. The quality of the relationships and the confidence that people have had in her as a leader throughout the project have helped her in her personal and professional growth. She appreciates the trust that people instilled in her and that neither she nor the older adults she works with are limited by anything.

ANGELA TZUL
Angela works to connect people to resources. She enjoys learning about different cultures and traditions by meeting all of the older adults in the program. She demonstrates her leadership skills by creating relationships with people and organizations.

LCFC Staff & Consultants

MARICRUZ HERRERA
Community-Based Contractor

CEC ORTIZ
Program Advisor

TONY TAPIA
Program Advisor & Consultant

DANIELA YOUNG
Program Officer
During its first three years (2011-2014), LAWC revealed many disparities in both access to quality care and the resulting quality of life for Latino older adults and their family caregivers. LAWC also determined that, while important, the preliminary emphasis on education and awareness-raising activities were simply not enough to address the full scope and scale of unmet needs.

In 2015, LAWC conducted a feasibility assessment to determine which programs to grow, stop or new programs to begin in order to develop a sustainable model.

Three questions were considered:

- **How can LAWC be a catalyst to create a shift in systems and access to services?**

- **What existing components of LAWC’s work needs to be customized to meet the needs of Latino older adults or what additional programs need to be initiated to meet these needs?**

- **What are the future needs of aging Latinos and how does LAWC position itself to serve those needs?**

As a result, in 2015 LAWC committed to building on previous efforts and created a family-centered approach to aging. This approach built upon multiple strengths of Latino communities, including strong family and community networks and a desire to age in place.
From 2015-2016, LAWC set out to build the family-centered approach to aging and develop a new theory of change. An outside contractor assisted the team in developing a 10-year plan with short- and long-term outcomes contributing to an enhanced system of care that better supports Latino older adults and their caregivers. In sum, the theory of change put forward the following purpose:

**To establish an active and effective system of community resources and related policies that meet the needs of families caring for older adults in Latino communities. It further sought to create systems, policy and practical changes that best reduce barriers and promote effective practices for Latino families.**

This purpose was based on the assumption that “a family-centered approach to aging allows families to age in place and contributes to better outcomes for individuals, families, communities and society at large.”

To bring this purpose to fruition, the LAWC team decided to focus on one local community and to learn how Latino families could benefit from an effective system of community resources and related policies that is culturally responsive.

**The outcomes sought were:**

- Improved health through care management and prevention
- Increased access to culturally appropriate services
- Enhanced economic security for multi-generational families
- Better administrative and legislative polices that shift resources to Latino older adults and their families.

LAWC met with representatives from local community organizations, service providers, older adults and caregivers in three geographic areas. The goal of these meetings was to assess community assets and disparities; potential for the community to close the disparity gap between Latino older adults and aging services through a family-centered approach to aging; and connectivity of individual residents, local associations and organizations.

**Montbello**, a community within the City of Denver was selected as the designated neighborhood through a rigorous vetting process.
Located in the Northwest of Denver, **Montbello** was identified as the most "ready" based on the following metrics:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>READINESS AREA</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
<th>DEMONSTRATION IN MONTBELLO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Representation</strong></td>
<td>The community is home to the project’s target population</td>
<td>61% of the population is Latino and 13% are Latino older adults. (as of 2017)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organizing</strong></td>
<td>The community has a culture of organizing and there are currently organizing efforts taking place</td>
<td>Montbello Organizing Committee (MOC) is a strong nonprofit located within the community; organizing is one of its cornerstones.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Network of Care</strong></td>
<td>There is a sufficient number of service providers and these providers are willing to work with LAWC</td>
<td>Several service providers have a presence in the community and are limited in their provision of aging-specific services to Latino older adults.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Systems</strong></td>
<td>There is representation of government, nonprofit and philanthropic support that can sustain the work over time</td>
<td>Representation of support for sustainability include Denver City Councilwoman Stacie Gilmore, Colorado Latino Leadership Advocacy and Research Organization, Montbello 2020, a faith alliance, Families First, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Impact</strong></td>
<td>The work of LAWC will add value and build on current efforts in the community.</td>
<td>No singular entity was specifically addressing Latino older adult matters, related to community enhancement, food insecurity, transportation, etc. An opportunity for interconnection was identified.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
With the decision to move forward with the family-centered approach to aging model in the Montbello community, LAWC reorganized its staffing structure in 2016.

While the initial work of the program had been completed by a team of consultants with community organizing, nonprofit and philanthropic experience, it grew with the addition of a full-time program manager who would oversee the day-to-day operations of LAWC and a contractor with the skill sets needed to engage Latino older adult residents living in Montbello.

While the program manager prioritized relationship building with representatives from local organizations and providers, the community-based contractor exercised strategies created by promotoras to connect one-on-one with Latino older adults and their families. The addition of promotoras would prove pivotal to the success of LAWC in the following years.

"Promotoras are neighbors, moms, dads, children, youth and members of our communities who believe in helping and including others to be part of the solution to create healthier places for all."

—Latino Health Access
A TIME FOR LISTENING

In early 2016, LAWC contracted Maricruz Herrera, a local promotora with a history of community organizing to help develop relationships with community members, especially Latino older adults aging in Montbello. Listening and learning strategies included one-on-one conversations and home visits with community residents and attending community meetings.

In May 2016, Herrera hosted two listening sessions at a local church where she reflected back areas of concern she identified through her conversations and observations of the community. These areas of concern included:

- A need for programs
- A lack of affordable food
- A lack of affordable housing
- Limited transportation options
- A lack of childcare options
- A lack of understanding and access to health services

Before closing the listening sessions, attendees asked if LAWC would continue to convene the group as it seemed this was the first time they had been asked what it was like to age in Montbello. June 2016 marked the first “official” monthly meeting. As Montbello lacked a community center or older adult-centered space, a community center embedded within an apartment complex was borrowed for this inaugural gathering.
FROM LEARNINGS TO ACTION

Initial community meetings developed into a monthly gathering of Latino older adults, their family members and friends, as well as representatives from aging service providers and local government.

Through these conversations, three priority areas for improvement in aging services in Montbello were identified by monthly meeting participants:

- Access to medical services, especially for those without a pathway to citizenship
- Access to dental and vision services
- Access to social opportunities

Social opportunities became the low hanging fruit of the priority areas and Herrera needed assistance to meet the demand and coordinate logistics. She recruited four community leaders—three of which were Montbello residents—to assist her in this area. Herrera designed a training for the leaders that included an overview of the LCFC, history of LAWC and elements of promotora and community organizing work. She further provided supervisory oversight and served as the liaison between community happenings and other LAWC team members. The community leaders dubbed themselves the Conectoras de Montbello (Connectors of Montbello) whose mission is to assist, educate and guide, with dignity, older adults of Denver’s Montbello community and surrounding areas. Monthly community meetings, launched through this 2016 learning process, built necessary trust in community. These meetings are still happening today.
SOCIAL ACTIVITIES LEAD THE WAY FOR IMPACT

The stability and regularity of monthly activities suggested and designed by community members provided a space for *convivencia* (living alongside each other), as well as relationship and trust building. Over time, the Conectoras also began visiting Latino older adults with mobility limitations in their homes so they still felt connected.

"I found my family in this program. Now my family is big."
- Señora Cipriana

**THE INSPIRATION FOR OUR ACTIVITIES**

Señor Amador inspired the jardín comunitario (community garden), sharing how he missed his gardening roots. Señora Manuela inspired manualidades (crafts). She wanted to share her sewing and craft skills with others. Señora Rosa and Señora Cipriana inspired Cafecito, a monthly gathering of (mostly) women to come together to share jokes, stories and song over coffee and pan dulce. Señora Adriana brought Lotería ("Mexican Bingo") to Montbello Manor after sharing about the lack of Spanish-language activities available. Since the game transcends language, all residents are able to participate.

Storytelling is a common form of communication within the Latino community. Monthly activities and home visits provided spaces for many stories to be shared. Among these stories, however, were stories of everyday survival, hardship and challenge in accessing much needed services. As patterns of need began to emerge, targeted and intentional relationship building with community partners and providers began. The schedule of already-established monthly activities evolved into an infrastructure of ready access points to connect providers with Latino older adults and create a community-centered care network. It was now time to expand beyond social activities to connecting older adults to services and service providers.
Part of the Latino Community Foundation of Colorado's role as an intermediary philanthropic organization is to use its resources to bring stakeholders together when goals align. This, too, plays out at the programmatic level. The Conectoras de Montbello were able to create and maintain spaces in which trust was built and families' needs shared. LAWC Program Manager Daniela Young and Consultant Tony Tapia were then able to activate their professional networks to vet and identify providers who may be a good fit to meet community needs. Serving as the intermediary, LAWC staff could get community and provider representatives at the same table.

One example where the role of intermediary proved imperative was the development of a relationship with University of Colorado's School of Dental Medicine. As access to dental care was identified as a top priority among the Montbello group, Young reached out to the school to identify any points for partnership. As it turns out, the school had been looking to recruit older adults so their students could develop the skill sets needed to best care for them. The Conectoras were invited to meet with school staff and tour the facility. They were able to ask questions about payment, transportation and procedure which could then be relayed back to the community.

Through this initial meet-and-greet, it was evident the school demonstrated several “readiness” factors which well-positioned them to best serve Latino older adults. Over time, the team has referenced these factors when considering partnerships with other providers. These readiness factors are outlined on the following page:
**READINESS CASE STUDY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>READINESS AREA</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
<th>DEMONSTRATION AT THE SCHOOL OF DENTAL MEDICINE</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Language</strong></td>
<td>Spanish-speaking providers/staff are available to provide interpretation as needed. Signage, materials and paperwork are provided in Spanish.</td>
<td>Spanish-speaking staff and student providers are available most of the time. All paperwork and signage is in English and Spanish languages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Representation</strong></td>
<td>Provider/Staff representation is reflective of client populations being served.</td>
<td>Administrative staff prides itself on its recruitment of staff and students that reflect the communities being served.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family-centered</strong></td>
<td>Time and space is provided for multiple family caregivers to attend appointments or visit loved ones. Spaces cater to multigenerational families.</td>
<td>A small waiting room is available and family members are welcome in the treatment area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relationships</strong></td>
<td>Organization commits to allowing time and space for relationship building.</td>
<td>Staff hosted a meet-and-greet and tour and brought a team to Montbello to complete dental health screenings and plans for follow up services.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Through this vetting process, LCFC programmatic staff and the Conectoras understood that the School of Dental Medicine could be a good partner for the project, and the readiness areas that all organizations would need to have to work successfully in the Montbello community.
BUILDING PARTNER BRIDGES

From 2017 through 2019, the LCFC staff concentrated on building relationships with service providers, and further ensured that older adult residents of Montbello would receive services by providing funding in the form of grants to service providers in dental work, health, and more.

GRANTS PROVIDED MEDICAL, VISION AND DENTAL SERVICES AND ACCESS TO TRANSPORTATION:

• **Mile High Health Alliance (Denver)** - implemented a mobile health van that held multiple health screenings as well as a second project with eyeglass screenings. Through their resources approximately 70 community members were able to access healthcare that was not easily accessible due to medical insurance and language barriers.

• **University of Colorado School of Dental Medicine (Denver)** - Dental services were provided through the school of dental medicine. Though this program ran into issues with the intersection of other health conditions and dental problems, it provided dental assistance to many community members.

• **A Little Help (Denver)** - Neighbors were connected to older adults and those partnerships led into a transportation relationship. There was increased communication, connection, and trust building with community and the older adults.
While the LCFC staff concentrated on building connections with service providers, the Conectoras continued their hands on work in community, continuing the personal relationships with older adults and their families and holding monthly activities. They decreased social isolation and offered resources and true connection that these older adults really need.

During this period LCFC staff also began the process of passing along managerial duties to the Conectoras de Montbello in order to create a program that would be able to assist community beyond the life of the LAWC program.

The Conectoras took over the planning, budgeting and executing of monthly social activities, continued relationship development with partner providers, resource connection, data collection and advising on grant distribution. They also began to be deeply involved in the process of data management and program evaluation.

Program evaluation was present throughout the life of the Latino Age Wave Colorado program, but the changes in the period of 2017-2019, when the program became more community-led, provide an impactful case study on strategies and design that works within a population that is not apt to trust traditional data gathering conventions.

During this period, the LAWC team changed tactics from a more traditional, academic approach that is born of white spaces to a culturally-responsive model that centers personal relationships, language justice, and mixed method data collection regarding technology and in-person/ virtual.

See how our evaluation and data gathering shifted over time on the next two pages.
LESSONS LEARNED

100 Latino older adults living in Montbello
Age 55+
8 surveys | 184 questions
Online data collection tool
One-on-One interaction | on paper
Spanish language

The team needed further flexibility in data collection process
Conectoras and community members needed to better understand data as a tool
Complex online systems are neither cost-effective nor necessary.
Center the importance of relationships and trust
Paper surveys instead of online

ROUND 1
2017

DATA STRATEGY
- 100 Latino older adults living in Montbello
- Age 55+
- 8 surveys | 184 questions
- Online data collection tool
- One-on-One interaction | on paper
- Spanish language

ROUND 2
2018

DATA STRATEGY
- Open to all program participants
- Focus on transportation
- 1 survey | 29 questions
- In a group | on paper
- Spanish language

LESSONS LEARNED
- Time-saving methods like filling out surveys in groups are beneficial
- Multi-generational perspective preferred: no reason to limit surveys to age 55+
- Plan for different literacy levels by using pictures and understandable language.

ROUND 3
2019

DATA STRATEGY
- 61 Latino older adults living in Montbello
- Age 55+
- 1 survey | 23 questions
- Mixed-methods | on paper
- Spanish language

LESSONS LEARNED
- Flexibility in data collection process by offering the surveys multiple ways.
- Identify opportunities for capacity building for the Conectoras to build their relationships and input the data into online databases.

EVALUATION STRATEGY

Shifting our data approach both led to stronger data outcomes and better served the community:
EVALUATION: LESSONS LEARNED

As evidenced in the chart on the previous page, evaluation strategies in Latino Age Wave Colorado were continuously amended in real time to ensure that data methodologies were accessible to community members and gathered worthwhile information—even if this went against the traditional approach to data collection.

By 2020, LAWC staff and Conectoras had determined that paper surveys were the best means of gathering information and content in Spanish and with high levels of visual prompts were the best format due to some limited literacy with community members. In addition, the Conectoras leading the questioning for in-person surveys furthered relationship building as well as comfort level around data collection. Along with in-person collection there were phone calls and group sessions.

Some main takeaways were that:

- There was increased participation in each community event (manualidades, cafecitos, monthly meetings, and lotería) as time went on.

- Participants more positively reported their health from 2017-2019 after participating in the program and having increased access to services.

- 100% surveyed Latino older adults reported that participation in monthly activities gives them a sense of family, gives purpose to their day, has introduced them to new friends, and keeps their body active.
EVALUATION: LESSONS LEARNED

As the LAWC program moved towards its eventual sunset at LCFC, efforts were put forward to ensure that the future of data collection was accessible to the community as well as the Conectoras who would now be leading the process. Putting data and accrued knowledge into the hands of the Conectoras, and committing to consistent report out to communities not only makes data collection and sharing more equitable, it allows communities to ultimately advocate for themselves.

This was a lesson that wasn't apparent to the LAWC team when the project started in 2011. Flexibility and cultural responsiveness were the most important factors for success—not historical success in academia or with non-Latino communities.

To ease the transition into equitable data practices we have streamlined our considerations and strategies:

- **Work within an equitable framework** - Introducing equitable practices from the beginning will make it second nature by the time that program implementation is going. This framework would center community involvement, ask questions in multiple languages, and check on phrasing of questions. The community are the experts, don’t overburden them with personal questions that aren’t necessary.

- **Create the environment that fosters change and connectivity** - Allowing for constant flexibility and open learning will allow for changes to happen in a productive way throughout the project.

- **Share power with knowledgeable community leaders** - The promotora model demonstrated that foundations are not the experts—community leaders are. Allow them to give feedback through the process, and compensate everyone who you are asking to do labor on behalf of your project.

- **Build trust throughout all processes** - This project would not have been a success without the trust that was built in the community. Offering as much transparency as possible and sharing responsibility of the project will continuously help build trust. Communities of color have valid historical reasons for not trusting those who enter community to study them; this cannot be countered quickly or easily in many cases.

- **Provide consultation and leadership development opportunities to the community** - Development and growth is the goal of most of these project. Do not only offer development to those on staff—sustainability of projects is the goal and allowing for development is the way to keep things going.

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**FOCUS ON QUALITY OVER QUANTITY OF SERVICE**

**FLEXIBILITY OF EXPLORING AND LISTENING TO COMMUNITY**

**COLLABORATE THROUGHOUT THE ENTIRE PROJECT**

**LISTEN TO THE PERSPECTIVES ON TRUE NEEDS OF POPULATION**
THE FUTURE IN MONTBELLO

The Latino Community Foundation of Colorado (LCFC) was proud to announce in mid-2020 that Latino Age Wave Colorado (LAWC) would be sunset at the end of the year in order to make way for the Conectoras de Montbello to take the helm of the Montbello community-based work serving Latino older adults, their families and friends.

As of 2021, the Conectoras de Montbello are continuing their work as an independent organization with an infrastructure for sustainability that gives them the opportunity to take over both day-to-day operations of the community-based work in Montbello, as well as overall project administration.

This is now a truly community-led project. Learn more about the work of the Conectoras by visiting their Facebook page or sending them an email at ConectorasDeMontbello@gmail.com.

LINKS AND CONTACT INFORMATION

LATINO AGE WAVE WEBPAGE
CONECTORAS DE MONTBELLO FACEBOOK PAGE

Please email the Conectoras de Montbello directly at conectorasdemontbello@gmail.com or through their Facebook to keep up with the work that they continue to do.