

UNA MANO AMIGA EN ESTE PAÍS

(A HELPING HAND IN THIS COUNTRY):

The Role of Hispanic Women's Resource Centers
in the Employment and Economic Development of
Latina Immigrants in New Jersey



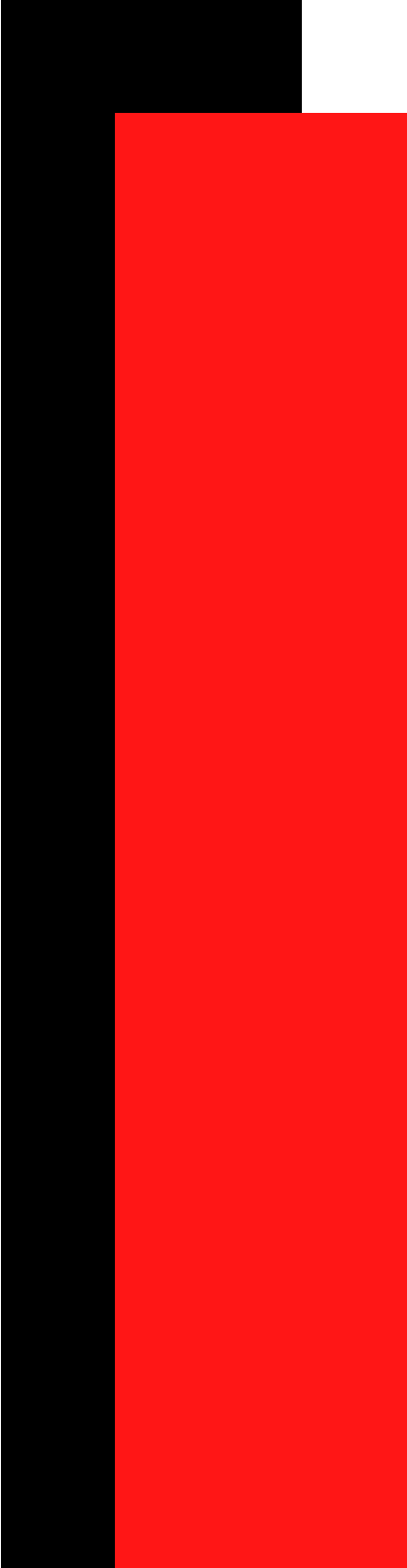
March 2023



RUTGERS

School of Management
and Labor Relations

CENTER FOR WOMEN AND WORK



"Corremos peligro regresar a nuestras paises solas. Entonces aquí solamente sobrevivimos. Tenemos que rentar un cuarto o un sótano. O sea vivimos en malas condiciones... a mí me ha tocado vivir en sótano, trabajar toda la noche, para qué? No temenos nada, nada. No existimos (para ellos)".

We risk being in danger if we return to our home countries alone. Therefore, we just survive (here). We must rent a room or a basement, I mean we live in bad conditions. I have had to live in a basement, and work all night long, and for what? We have nothing, nothing. We don't exist (to them).

LATINO ACTION NETWORK FOUNDATION

The Latino Action Network Foundation (LANF) is a 501(c) charitable foundation that was established in 2010 with the goal of uniting New Jersey's diverse Latino communities and advancing our economic and social empowerment. LANF is organized to research the issues impacting Latino communities in New Jersey, develop policy proposals to address those issues, and conduct outreach among Latino communities throughout New Jersey, including lower-income and immigrant communities. We are deeply committed to a just society for everyone and oppose all forms of discrimination, including those based on race, ethnicity, gender, religion, class, disability, or sexual orientation.

CENTER FOR WOMEN AND WORK

The Center for Women and Work (CWW) promotes economic and social equity for women workers, their families, and their communities. CWW conducts research, advances education, and engages in programming that supports women in the workplace and contributes to effective policy making. CWW's work focuses on providing training, technical assistance, and programs for students, educators, industry, and governments; analyzing and addressing issues that directly affect the living standards of working families locally and globally; and collaborating with partners to support community-level work. CWW is housed within the School of Management and Labor Relations at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey and is a member of the Institute for Women's Leadership Consortium.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

This project began with a conversation between the [Latino Action Network Foundation](#) (LANF) and the [Center for Women and Work](#) (CWW) about the stark earnings gap that New Jersey Latinas experience. In New Jersey, Latinas earn approximately 45 cents for every dollar a non-Hispanic White man earns, and even less if you include part-time and seasonal workers (Center for Women and Work, 2022). New Jersey, one of the wealthiest states in the nation, has one of the largest gender earnings gaps for Latinas. Only the state of California ranks lower than the Garden State.

The persistence of the gender earnings gap in the United States has been well-documented and reflects the structural nature of the difference in pay between men and women. The gender earnings gap is particularly effective in revealing how occupational segregation and the undervaluation of women's work hold back women and their ability to support themselves and their families. Historically, much of the attention has been on the overall wage gap for all women, the most recent of which indicates that on average, women earn 83.7 cents for every dollar a White, non-Hispanic man earns. When we use an intersectional lens on the wage gap, and consider race, country of origin, ethnicity, and documentation status, the gaps grow deeper, and

in the case of New Jersey, raise real concerns about who the economy is serving and who it is leaving behind. Hispanic women's or Latinas' contribution to New Jersey's economy is significant.* According to a Center for Women and Work analysis of the 2021 American Community Survey, Latinas represent 9% of New Jersey's labor force. While many members of the Hispanic community have deep roots in New Jersey and have been in the United States for generations, new immigrants are also embedded in our communities and continue to come to our state to seek safety, find opportunity, and build a new future for themselves and their families. Latina immigrants alone fuel 5% of the state's labor force. While Latinas support the economy, many as essential and frontline workers in low-wage jobs, they often find themselves unable to access services, supports, and social safety nets. Access to childcare, unemployment insurance, healthcare, housing, and forward-thinking policies intended to support workers without access to paid time off through their employer, such as Family Leave Insurance and Earned Sick Leave, remain out of reach for a variety of reasons.

These challenges were exacerbated with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and sparked advocates to fight for programming and funds to support New Jersey households who were excluded from the federal stimulus checks and COVID-related unemployment assistance, including undocumented individuals. The establishment of the Excluded New Jerseyans Fund and New Jersey's recent expansion of eligibility for NJ FamilyCare healthcare coverage for children are examples of policies that advocate and policy makers advanced to address some of the gaps that working families, and members of our immigrant communities in particular, experience.

LANF provides support to four Hispanic Women's Resource Centers (HWRCs) that were established by legislation in 1991 to provide culturally responsive and inclusive employment and training services to Latinas in New Jersey. LANF asked us to partner with them to help document the lived experience that the clients of the HWRCs have with regard to access to employment, working conditions, caring for themselves and their loved ones, and how they think about their future. CWW conducted a community-based study of Latinas served by the HWRCs and their first-person experiences. Our aim is to center the voices of the women who took time to share their stories and help us understand the unique role that the HWRCs play in New Jersey.

***On Using the Term Hispanic**

We recognize that there are multiple words used to describe Latin American immigrants and descendants in the U.S., including Hispanic, Latino/a, Latinx, and Latine. While many Latin American immigrants and descendants simply prefer to identify with their countries of origin directly, the aforementioned terms are often used interchangeably to represent the larger group. We recognize and respect that these terms have different connotations for specific groups of individuals, and that context matters.

For the purposes of this study, the specific terms "Hispanic" and "Latinas" have been chosen as umbrella terms because the former aligns with the title of the Hispanic Women's Resource Centers on which the study is based, and both are terms that are widely used/acknowledged by most federal and state government agencies and documents, including the US Census.

PROJECT DESIGN

This research was conducted in partnership with the Latino Action Network Foundation (LANF) to develop an understanding of the employment and economic conditions of Latina immigrants in New Jersey served by the Hispanic Women’s Resource Centers (HWRCs), and to gain insight into the impact of the HWRCs. The Center for Women and Work (CWW) convened a total of eight focus groups in the fall of 2022. Each focus group included 5-13 participants. In total, 69 women were included in the study. Their countries of origin included Mexico, Venezuela, Ecuador, Peru, El Salvador, Guatemala, the Dominican Republic, Costa Rica, and Colombia. Recruitment for the focus groups was supported by the staff at each of the four HWRCs who shared recruitment materials with clients through email, postings, and one-on-one conversations. Any woman using HWRC services was eligible to participate. Two focus groups were conducted virtually. Six were held in-person at the HWRCs. All recruitment and consent materials were provided in English and Spanish; focus groups were conducted exclusively in Spanish. Participants received \$50 gift cards for their participation. The team also conducted brief interviews with each of the HWRCs leadership teams prior to conducting the focus groups.

Our questions focused on five primary areas: employment and opportunity; education and training; childcare; barriers and solutions; and goals and aspirations. We recorded and transcribed the focus groups, and then translated them into English. Members of the research team analyzed the transcripts using thematic analysis. The Rutgers Institutional Review Board approved this research.

BACKGROUND: HISTORY OF THE HISPANIC WOMEN'S RESOURCE CENTERS

In New Jersey, Hispanic Women's Resource Centers (HWRCs) provide services to Latinas in order to improve the earnings, earnings potential, and job prospects of their clients. They focus on facilitating the development of Hispanic Women's employment skills by offering English language courses, computer training, resume assistance, and interviewing preparation. They also help prepare Latina immigrants who have training and education credentials to enter the workforce by obtaining certified translations of their credentials from their home countries. The target clientele of the HWRCs are people who identify as women and Latin American or of Spanish culture with roots in South America, Central America, Mexico, or Caribbean Islands.

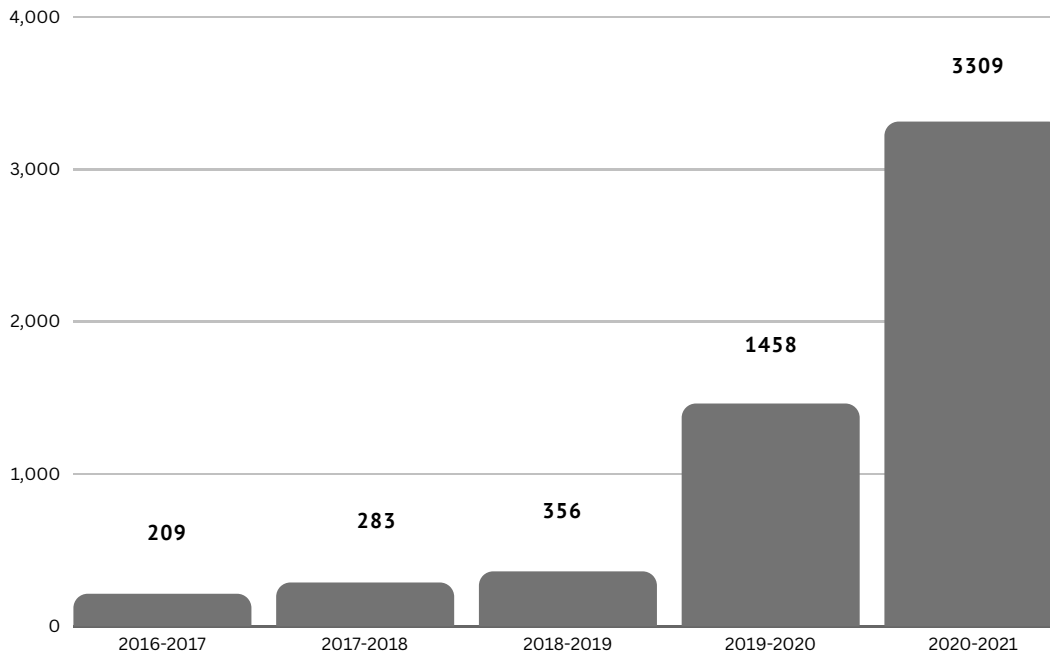
"Me encanta la institución, he recibido mucha ayuda incondicional de parte de la trabajadora, siempre atenta para ayudarnos. Es una mano amiga aquí en este país".

I love the institution. I have received a lot of unconditional support from the caseworker; she is always available to help us. It is a helping hand here in this country.

The HWRCs were established as a state-funded demonstration project in 1988 after "a massive campaign by the Hispanic Women's Task Force and other state and local organizations..."(Bonilla-Santiago, 1989). The Centers were defunded in 2010. With advocacy led by the Latino Action Network Foundation and others, funding was reinstated in 2016, and the centers were reestablished.

State funding for the HWRCs comes through the New Jersey Department of Children and Families' Division on Women. Centers also leverage funding from other public and private sources. Following the reinstatement of their funding, the HWRC's opened their doors and the number of clients has increased exponentially ever since, as illustrated in the graph below:

CLIENTS SERVED BY HISPANIC WOMEN'S RESOURCE CENTERS



Note: Client data provided by the Latino Action Network Foundation.

TODAY'S HISPANIC WOMEN'S RESOURCE CENTERS

There are currently four Hispanic Women's Resource Centers in New Jersey. Each are embedded within nonprofit community organizations that serve Hispanic constituents in particular regions of the state. The following page includes a brief description of each of these agencies.

LA CASA DE DON PEDRO - Newark, NJ

La Casa de Don Pedro (La Casa) was established in 1972 as an “activist, community-based, grassroots organization committed to empowering the Latino and Puerto Rican,” (La Casa de Don Pedro, n.d.). La Casa has an expansive service delivery model designed to meet the evolving needs of the children, individuals, and families in the Greater Newark area. The agency provides expanded, multi-dimensional services in early childhood development, youth programs, youth & family counseling, health initiatives, HIV/AIDS prevention & services, workforce development & job placement, affordable housing development and counseling, community development and organizing, Lead Safe Home Remediation and home energy assistance, and home energy conservation. In 2006, La Casa de Don Pedro established their HWRC, which provides English as a Second Language (ESL) tutoring, High School Equivalency (HSE) coaching, scholarships, job training, and other resources. They serve Latinx women in Passaic, Hudson, Bergen, Essex, and Union counties of New Jersey.

HISPANIC FAMILY CENTER OF SOUTHERN NEW JERSEY - Camden, NJ

The Hispanic Family Center of Southern New Jersey, Inc. (HFC) is a comprehensive human services agency with locations in Camden and Gloucester counties that provide services to the residents of Southern New Jersey. HFC began as a small advocacy organization within North Camden that was founded in 1976 as the Hispanic Health and Mental Health Association, recognizing a need for services for a growing Hispanic population in Camden City. Since that time, HFC has blossomed into one of the largest bilingual Hispanic human services organizations in Camden City and provides a broad range of culturally relevant social services and advocacy programs to the community that promote and encourage empowerment and self-sufficiency. HFC currently operates 20 mission driven programs and services that address the immediate and long-term physical, mental, social, and economic needs of the residents of Southern New Jersey.

MORRIS COUNTY ORGANIZATION FOR HISPANIC (MCOHA) - Dover, NJ

The Morris County Organization for Hispanic Affairs (MCOHA) provides legal and social services and client advocacy for Hispanic and low-income people in Morris County, New Jersey. The HWRC at MCOHA (Centro de Empoderamiento para la Mujer Latina) was established in 2019. With two main locations in Morris County, they serve women from low- and middle-income households. They offer case management, support, and training in various skills, including ESL as well as computer, creative, and financial skills. Services include resume and application assistance, among others. They focus on promoting the development of professional skills in order to enhance employment as well as on the personal development of their clients. With three primary objectives of “Discover,” “Learn,” and “Take over the Future,” the HWRC at MCOHA aims to enable Hispanic women to try new opportunities as means of changing their lives and communities.

COMMUNITY AFFAIRS AND RESOURCE CENTER (CARC) - Asbury Park and Lakewood, NJ

Community Affairs and Resource Center, formerly Hispanic Affairs and Resource Center, was established in 1980 and is a non-profit social services organization. Its main office is in Asbury Park, and it has satellite offices in Freehold, Keyport, and Lakewood. CARC provides services to a diverse group of clients. It aims to revitalize the communities it serves by providing social services to economically disadvantaged people. The services they provide include ESL classes, case management, resume writing and other career services, services related to domestic violence and sexual assault (support groups, legal advocacy, etc.), skill building and self-care workshops and classes (computer classes, tailoring classes, yoga, etc.), rental assistance, utility assistance, and the LEAD-Safe Home Remediation Pilot Grant program.

SERVICE DELIVERY MODEL: “PROMOTORAS DE SALUD”

At the core of much of the work being done at the HWRCs is the “Promotoras de Salud”, or Community Health Worker, model of service delivery. The history of this model can be traced back as early as the 1960s in the United States. The American Public Health Association adopted the following description for a Community Health Worker:

A Community Health Worker is a frontline public health worker who is a trusted member of and/or has an unusually close understanding of the community served. This trusting relationship enables the Community Health Worker to serve as a liaison/link/intermediary between health/social services and the community to facilitate access to services and improve the quality and cultural competence of service delivery. A Community Health Worker also builds individual and community capacity by increasing health knowledge and self-sufficiency through a range of activities such as outreach, community education, informal counseling, social support, and advocacy.
(MHP Salud, n.d.)

Promotoras often serve low-income and marginalized communities whose predominant language is Spanish. Because of their strong cultural ties to these communities, promotoras have an understanding of the unique challenges their clients face, and are able to build meaningful and trusted relationships with them, while connecting them with the resources and information that will be of most value to them. This allows promotoras to conduct crucial outreach and education activities and programs for groups that have limited access to larger governmental systems/structures and have been otherwise ignored or overlooked (Centers for Disease Control, 2019).

While conducting the research for this study, it was clear that the women being served at the HWRCs were benefitting from this model of service delivery. Many of the focus group participants mentioned specific workers by name and talked about the impact they had made on their respective lives. Hearing these stories was a testament

to the positive results and outcomes that can come from employing this model of service delivery. The clients discussed feeling empowered by the workers and embraced by a community that felt like home to them. This sense of empowerment and support might be especially important for newcomers who have limited ties and connections in a foreign place.

"Yo vine aquí al centro porque cuando llegue al país, llegué con mi hija y mi esposo pero no me acostumbraba, quería regresarme, me sentía muy triste, muy sola y me hablaron de esta comunidad... vine donde Melissa y Reina, y a ellas las sentí y las siento como mis hermanas porque me dieron mucho apoyo".

I came to the center because when I arrived in this country, I arrived with my daughter and my husband, but I couldn't get adjusted, I wanted to return, I felt sad, very alone, and they spoke to me about this community. I came to Melissa and Reina, and I felt like they were, and are, my sisters because they have helped me so much.

FINDINGS: ECONOMIC AND EMPLOYMENT CONDITIONS OF LATINA IMMIGRANTS IN NEW JERSEY

Since 2012 the share of Hispanic women has grown from less than 10% to almost 20% of all women in the American labor force (Joint Economic Committee, 2002). Across the nation, Hispanic women have high rates of labor force participation, and New Jersey is no exception. Even in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, Hispanic women's attachment to the labor force remained strong. For instance, in 2019, prime-age Hispanic women's labor force participation in New Jersey was 71.7%, falling slightly to 70.2% in 2020, likely due to increased childcare demands and other pandemic related disruptions (Small and Lancaster, 2022).

"Es que ellos saben. Cuando uno llega ellos saben que uno no tiene documentos. Es como si lo olieran. Entonces uno no va poder pasar de los ocho, nueve, diez dólares... a lo único que nosotras podemos acceder es a limpieza, esa es la verdad".

They know it. When you arrive, they know that you're undocumented. It's like they can smell it. So you're never going to get more than \$8, \$9, \$10... the only thing we can access is cleaning jobs, and that's the truth.

Despite high rates of participation in education and in the labor force, Latinas confront a range of obstacles to accessing greater economic opportunities and continue to be among the lowest paid demographic groups in New Jersey. Occupational segregation and unpaid caregiving responsibilities which are still carried out disproportionately by women, go a long way in explaining the pay gap for all women, and Latinas in particular, but they do not tell the whole story (Lancaster, Rodgers, Daux, Gracia-Rivera, Park, Deitch, 2021). This is especially true for Latina immigrants. The findings outlined in this study are intended to provide insight into the barriers and economic conditions that Latina immigrants in New Jersey are experiencing.

ACCESS TO EMPLOYMENT

Finding Work

With limited job prospects and networks in this country, the women who participated in this study rely heavily on personal relationships and word-of-mouth referrals when looking for employment and job opportunities. Almost half of them stated that they had found work via a referral from a friend or family member, while the second highest source of referrals came from the HWRCs themselves, followed by use of temporary agencies. Social media was another source of information for job prospects, with Facebook groups being a popular option. Some of the women also said they had taken the initiative to apply directly at local companies and businesses as walk-in applicants, but the outcomes from that strategy were mixed.

"Yo a través de Melissa pude conseguir empleo, iba a varias agencias y no me aceptaban, gracias a la gestión y recomendación de Melissa y al curso de Inglés conseguí trabajo".

Through Melissa I was able to get a job, I was going to multiple agencies and they wouldn't accept my applications. Thanks to Melissa's gesture and recommendation as well as the English course I was able to get a job.

"Aquí la referencia ha sido sumamente importante. O sea que si hoy día te llama una persona y te dice "ayúdame"... y si quedas bien, eres honrada. La referencia ha sido una de las cosas más importantes para conseguir un trabajo mientras en mi país no es así".

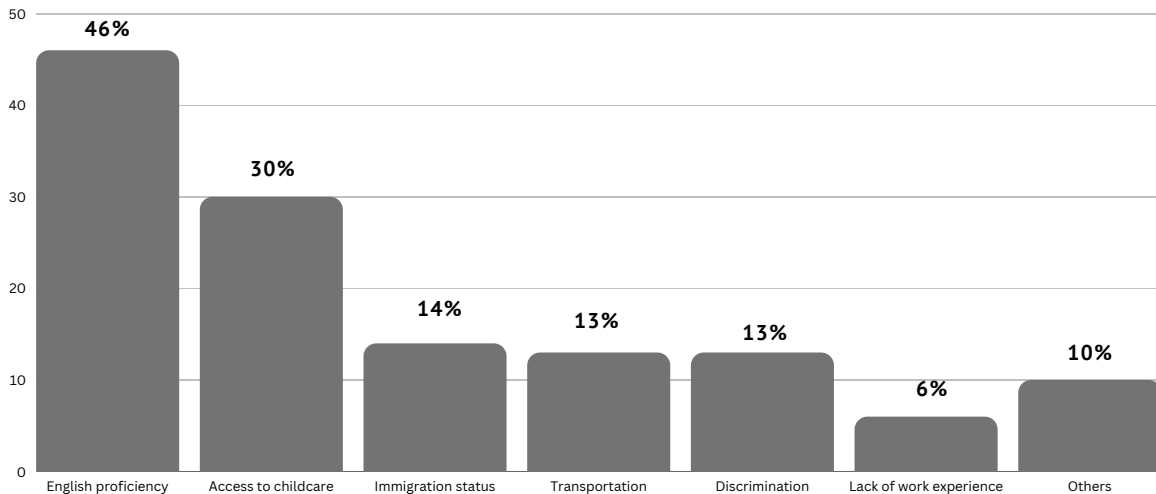
References have been extremely important here. If someone calls you one day and says please help me, and you do right by them, then you're considered honorable. A reference has been one of the most important factors in finding a job here, meanwhile it's not really like that in my country.

Barriers/Challenges

When discussing challenges faced while attempting to find employment in New Jersey, over 46% of the women in the study listed their lack of English proficiency as a primary barrier. This was the barrier cited most often, followed by access to childcare. Many of the participants felt that increased English language skills would increase their employment options, and almost all of them had been enrolled in ESL classes at some point. ESL classes are a lifeline for this population, and they rely heavily on the HWRCs for this service, as they are able to access classes free of charge, in a familial environment.

Some common factors that contributed to their ability to learn English fluently included the length of time in the ESL program, frequency, duration, scheduling (i.e., time of day classes are held), access to multiple levels (English I, II, & III, etc.), and the instructor’s pacing. Those who had been in the United States for several years and were not yet fluent stated that they often faced incompatibilities between making time for work, family, or taking classes. If the classes were not held at a convenient time, or if they didn’t have anyone to care for their children, then they couldn’t participate in the classes on a regular basis.

BARRIERS/CHALLENGES



Note: Multiple answer question

The other barriers to employment rounding out the top five included immigration status, transportation, and racism/discrimination. Getting to and from work was of particular concern for those women who lived in areas where public transportation options were limited or nonexistent. However, even clients who had access to multiple forms of public transportation expressed frustration over the time and effort required to get to some job sites. One woman talked about having to take two trains and a bus to her cleaning job at a hotel. What would have been only a 30-minute car ride, took her over two hours each way.

"Yo empecé aquí a estudiar Inglés pero por motivos que empecé a trabajar ya no pude seguir con las clases de Inglés. Con las clases que dan aquí uno aprende, pero ya en horario de la tarde se hace difícil con los niños en la casa".

I started taking English classes here, but because I started working, I could not keep up with them. You can learn (the language) with the classes they have here, but they are scheduled in the afternoons and it's difficult with kids at home.

Our discussion also brought forth several stories regarding overt racist and discriminatory incidents experienced by the participants, regardless of immigration status or time spent in the US. One example was shared by a client who had been in the country for several years and had the opportunity to acquire English skills. During an interview, a prospective employer said to her:

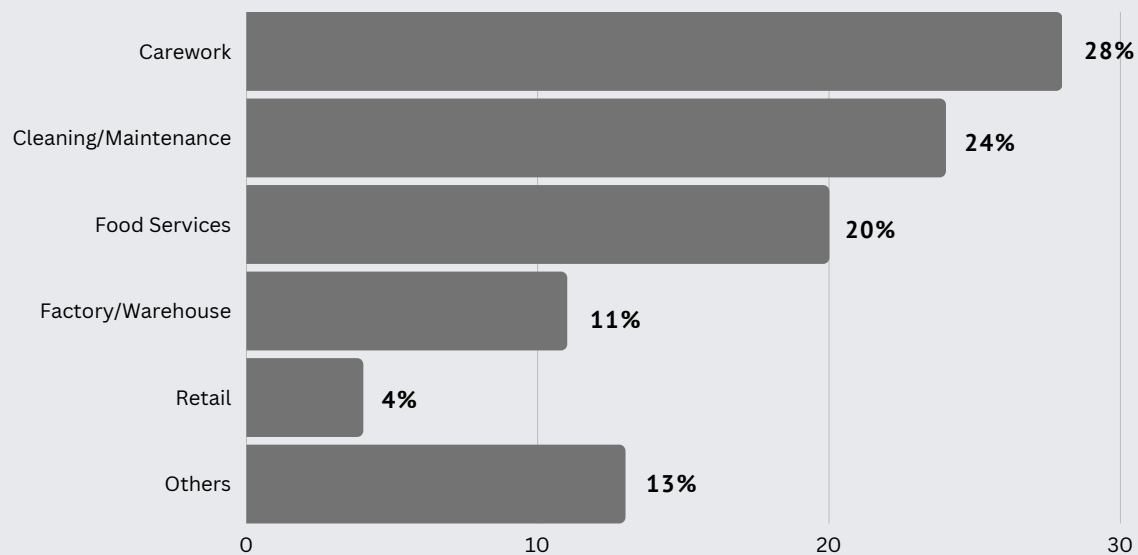
"I cannot pay you too much because you have a strong accent.' The job was for data entry. I never forgot that. I said of course, 'I speak two languages'."

Additional barriers and/or challenges cited by group members include lack of work experience in the US, scheduling/time constraints, sexual harassment, lack of education or skills, lack of funds to further their education, and a lack of referrals for job prospects.

EMPLOYMENT CONDITIONS

Latina workers are clustered in low-wage sectors and occupations, such as childcare, housekeepers, and waitresses, and have historically been underrepresented in high-wage jobs (Lancaster et al., 2021). The women in our focus groups mirrored this trend as the occupations represented among them included retail, cleaning/maintenance, factory or warehouse work, care work, and food services. Of the 69 participants, 64% of them were employed at the time, and all but a few had work history in the United States. A very small number of women, 6%, were self-employed, and all of the women who identified as self-employed were working as house cleaners. Over half, or 52% of those who were employed, were working as cleaners or care workers.

DOMINANT OCCUPATIONS



Income/Making Ends Meet

The earnings of Latinas tend to be very low. The median earnings of Latina wage and salary workers in the US as a whole are \$29,000, compared to \$30,000 in New Jersey, according to CWW analysis of the 2021 American Community Survey. Among Latina immigrants, median earnings are even lower: \$26,400 in the US as a whole and \$27,000 in New Jersey. Likewise, Hispanic families have little wealth relative to White families: the median net worth of White families is 12 times larger than that of Hispanic families (New Jersey Institute for Social Justice, 2022).

"Haces una lista, por ejemplo, de lo que tu ganas, y el consumo de los pagos (comida, renta, transporte, telefono) si tu pones todo en esa lista y tu dices 'bueno dejame ni mirar la lista.' Uno quisiera sentarse en un restaurante... quizás pedir un helado por decir. Pero no te alcanza, porque no da".

You make a list, for example, of what you earn, and the total of payments owed (food, rent, transport, telephone) I mean, if you put everything on that list then you end up not even wanting to look at the list. You would like to sit down at a restaurant... perhaps have yourself even just some ice cream. But you can't afford it because you don't have enough.

Making ends meet is a challenge for most of the focus group participants. Eighty-three percent of them indicated that they only earn enough income to cover basic expenses. Some of them talked about needing to have multiple adults living in one home in order to meet basic household expenses, and others mentioned having to use credit cards to cover some of their necessities because they did not earn enough. The precarity and unpredictability of some employment arrangements also creates challenges when trying to budget (Zundl and Lancaster, 2020). Only two out of the 69 women said they had extra money for leisure activities.

Scheduling/Time Off/Benefits

Low-wage workers often lack access to employer-sponsored benefits, including paid time off, retirement plans, and health insurance. Advocates often look to the states to help fill in the gaps through legislation. New Jersey is considered a leader in this arena. For example, New Jersey is one of only 11 states that has a paid family leave program. The state's policy allows eligible workers to take up to 12 weeks of paid family leave to bond with a new child (birth, foster, or adopted), to care for a seriously ill loved one, or to deal with issues related to domestic or sexual violence. New Jersey's policy has been in place since 2006. Yet, 64% of the focus group participants had no knowledge of this legislation, or any other labor rights/laws in place to protect and/or support workers. Even policies designed to include some of the most marginalized workers in the state, such as New Jersey's earned sick leave legislation, which took effect in 2018, are unknown. Research focused on the implementation of New Jersey's policies largely aligns with the experiences of the HWRC clientele. A recent study on employee experiences in big box retail stores found that less than half, or 46% of Hispanic workers surveyed, had heard about New Jersey's paid leave policy, the lowest of any group (Schneider, Harknett, and Collins, 2020). Only 5 out of 69 focus group participants indicated having any

paid time off from their employers to care themselves or a loved one if they become ill or need a day off for personal reasons. Many participants indicated that they would show up to work even if they were ill because they could not afford to lose a day's pay.

"En mi persona yo tuve dos [niños] en México y dos aquí, y no existe ningún tipo de ayuda. Yo tuve a mi hijo con cesárea, y tuve que regresar a la semana a trabajar porque si no, económicamente no podía; no recibía mis ingresos. Yo trabajaba en ese tiempo en 7-11. Me pagaban \$7.70 [por hora] y no hay garantías de nada".

I had two [children] in Mexico and two [children] here, and no type of help exists. With my son, I had a c-section and had to return to work after a week because if not, I wouldn't be able to make it financially; I wouldn't get paid. At that time, I worked at 7-11. They paid me \$7.70 (an hour) and there's no guarantee of anything.

Employer-provided healthcare benefits are also rare among the participants. Though our focus group questions did not specifically ask about healthcare, many of the participants shared that they did not have access to healthcare benefits via their employers. Regarding their work schedules, 70% of those who were currently employed had fixed or set hours, whereas the others were working in jobs with fluctuating or intermittent schedules. There was also a general lack of time for leisure among the participants: only four out of the 69 women said they had extra time for leisure activities with their families.

"En el caso de las agencias, si pides permiso por enfermedad, luego no te programan para trabajar, es como un castigo".

In the case of the (temp) agencies, if you ask for sick leave, then they will not schedule you to work, it's like a punishment.

"Los permisos no son pagados, así yo estuviera enferma, no pedía permiso porque necesitaba trabajar aun enferma, para no perder el día".

The leaves are not paid, so even if I was sick I would not request a leave because I had to work, even while sick, so that I wouldn't lose out on the day.

IMPACT ON THE FAMILY

Childcare Needs

Childcare emerged as a major area of concern among the focus group participants. Many participants indicated they did not have access to childcare subsidies, and some reported having mixed experiences with finding childcare that they could trust. In a recent analysis, CWW found that Hispanic parents in New Jersey were more likely than non-Hispanic parents to report experiencing childcare disruptions, often leading to a reduction in working hours and income (Small and Lancaster, 2022). Among the HWRC clients, childcare was the second most common answer when we asked about barriers to employment. Of the 69 women interviewed, 21 of them, or 30%, said that their current job prospects were limited because they did not have someone to care for their children while they worked. The majority of their children were school-aged, so they expressed a need for before- or after-school programs or other childcare arrangements so that they could work full-time hours of 9-5 or take on part-time evening/weekend work. This was especially pertinent for those who did not have partners or other family members who could assist with child rearing responsibilities.

“Cuando van a la escuela hay que turnarse con el esposo y encontrar un trabajo que te permita llevarlas (niñas) en la mañana o recogerlas en la tarde, porque no te da tiempo para llevarlas y recogerlas”.

When they go to school you have to take turns with your husband and find a job that'll let you take them to school in the morning and pick them up in the afternoon because you can't find the time to take them and pick them up.

IMPACT ON THE FAMILY

Supporting Additional Family Members

In addition to supporting their children and/or partners, almost half of the women stated that they were helping to support additional family members such as parents and siblings located in the US and/or their home countries. Despite struggling to cover their own basic expenses, many of them discussed a sense of duty to their families and community, indicating that contributing to the well-being of their families and community was a responsibility they did not take lightly. For example, one participant stated to us, “Es nuestra expectativa ayudar a la familia salir adelante, no hay de otra manera (It is an expectation that we are going to help our families get ahead, there is no other way)”. Others also shared this sentiment, especially in cases where there were ailing family members, or those impacted by extenuating circumstances or traumatic events.

"Tengo mi mamá, mis hermanas, que están en mi país y están pasandola mal, yo estando aquí tengo que ayudarlas".

My mother and my sisters are in my home country and they are having financial hardship, I have to help them.

"En mi país tengo a mis hijos y mi madre que está enferma, y ya no trabaja, y cuando mis hijos eran pequeños ella me los cuidó, así que yo soy la única mujer y la única que estoy aquí y soy la única que la ayuda".

In my country I have my children and my mother who's sick and doesn't work anymore and when my children were young she took care of them, so I am the only woman and only one here and I am the only one who helps her.

THE ROLE OF THE HISPANIC WOMEN'S RESOURCE CENTERS

As previously discussed, the Centers employ the “Promotoras de Salud” service delivery model. This approach has allowed workers to develop meaningful connections with their clients. Indeed, some of the women served by the Centers even referred to specific workers by name more than once and stated that they consider them like family. Many focus group participants credited these workers and the Centers for providing care and services that played a significant role in helping them adapt to life in the US. They felt that the workers genuinely cared about their wellbeing and were invested in their personal and professional success.



SERVICES OBTAINED AT THE HWRC TO ADVANCE PERSONAL/PROFESSIONAL GOALS

When inquiring about which services the women had accessed at the HWRCs to support them in achieving their personal and/or professional goals, the most common response from our groups was English classes. There were several variations in how and when classes were delivered at the different centers, but the most impactful model was that in which the clients could participate in classes several days a week and engage in multiple levels of coursework such as English I, II, and III, at the same location. Several centers had waiting lists for their ESL courses.

The response that came in second was employment services, which included a wide range of services from job referrals and assistance filling out applications, to resume writing and interview preparation. Aside from helping them with the technical aspects of job hunting, the assistance from the Centers seemed to provide a boost of confidence for many of the women, giving them an additional push to apply for positions even if they felt hesitant to do so at first.

"Me ayudaron con la preparación de mi resumé, fui a varias entrevistas en inglés, con miedo pero lo hice".

They helped me prepare my resume, I did a few interviews in English, I was scared but I did it.

Other helpful services at the HWRCs that were identified by the participants included job training, computer classes, educational funds, translation services, counseling/therapy, energy and/or other bills assistance, financial assistance for driving lessons, clothing, holiday gifts, domestic violence services, referrals for medical services, nutrition/food services, special group discussions/workshops, parenting classes, and legal or immigration services. There was a general sentiment among many of the participants that if the Center itself did not offer a particular service, that the staff would be sure to help them identify other agencies and/or resources to get what they needed.

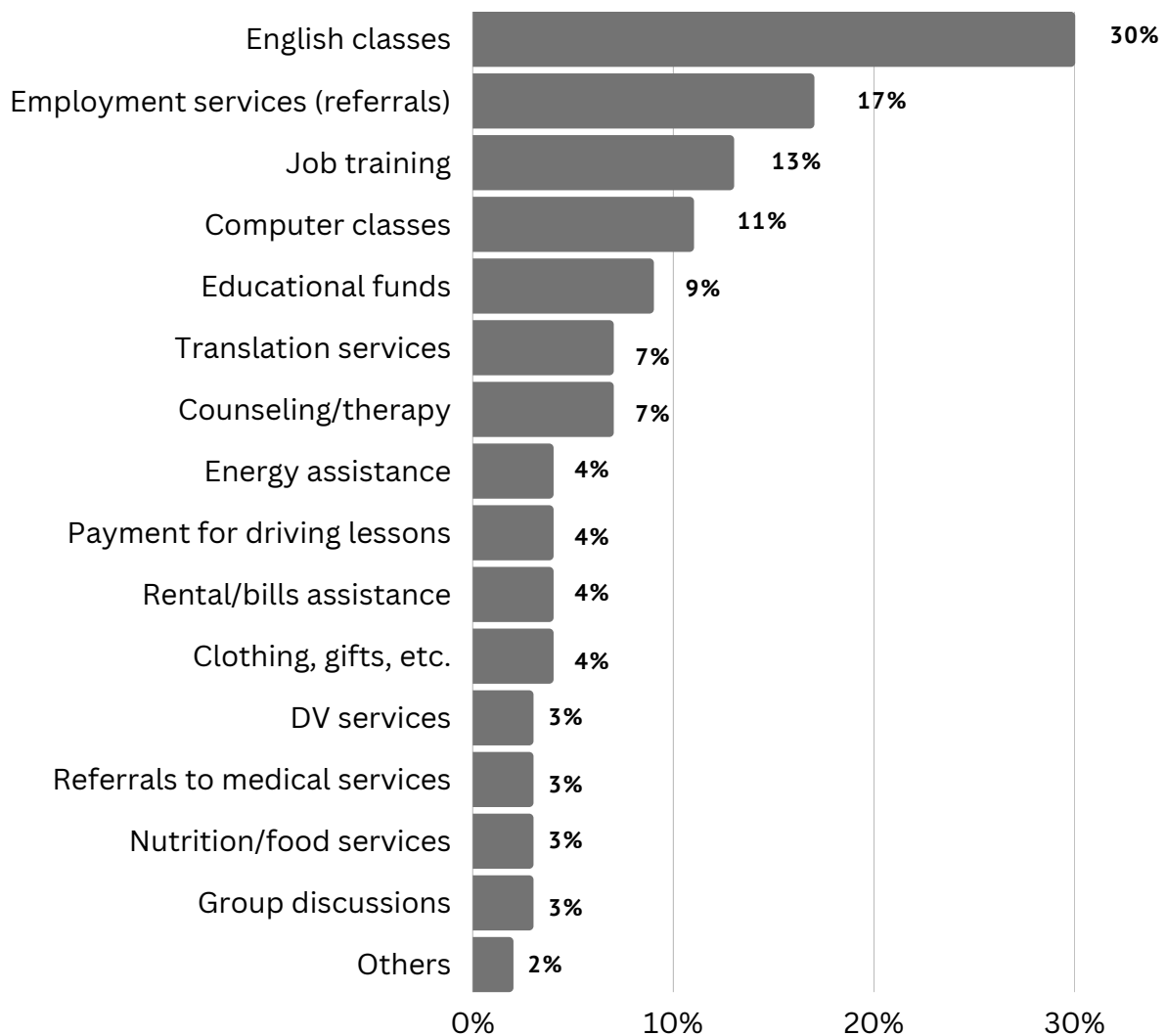
"En este lugar me ayudaron en todo, lo del servicio médico, las cartas en inglés... Aquí me ayudaron para el permiso de manejo, las clases, me pagaron las clases del manejo. Hasta aquí recibí ayuda de renta, a través de la situación del cáncer de mi hijo. Entonces este, pues yo he recibido bastante ayuda de este lugar. De todas los.. ahorita estoy hasta en psicólogo, yo vengo aquí al psicólogo. Los lunes vengo con mi psicólogo. Y ahorita estoy yendo a un grupo de violencia doméstica. A mi me han ayudado económicamente, emocionalmente, por eso es que yo vengo a este lugar".

In this place they helped me in everything, with medical service, letters in English... Here they helped me with getting a driver's permit, the classes, they paid for my driving lessons. Here I even received help for my rent, through the situation with my son's cancer. Well then, I've received a lot of help from this place. Of all types..right now I'm even in therapy, I come here to the psychologist/therapist. On Mondays I go see my psychologist/therapist. And right now I'm going to a domestic violence support group. They have helped me economically, emotionally, that's why I come to this place.

“Yo empecé con el curso de inglés, luego seguí con la búsqueda de trabajo y cada vez que necesito un trabajo siempre me ayudan, también con el servicio de energía eléctrica”.

I started with the English class and then I looked for jobs. They always help every time I need a job, even with my utilities/electrical service.

SERVICES OBTAINED AT THE HWRC

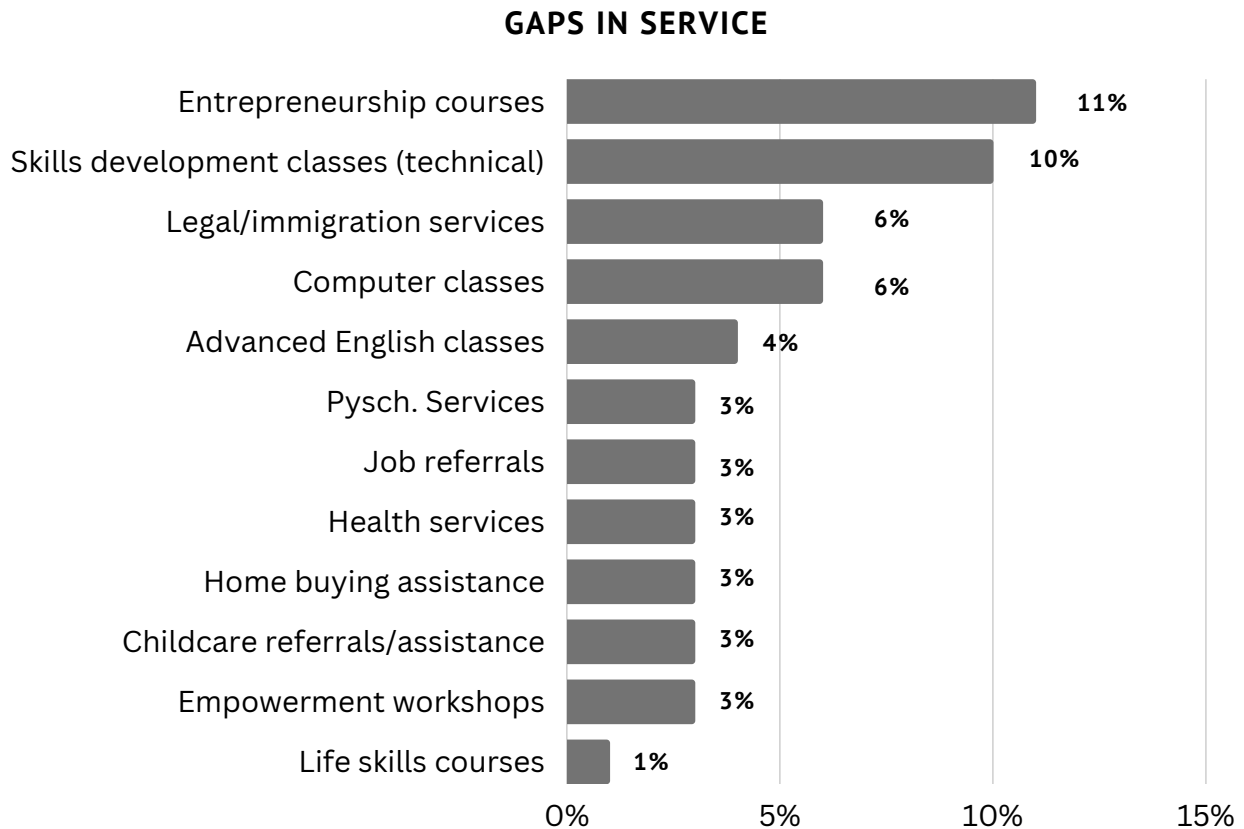


Note: Multiple answer question

GAPS IN SERVICE (OPPORTUNITIES FOR EXPANSION OF SERVICES)

We asked the groups about whether there were services not currently being offered at the HWRCs that they would benefit from or would like to see in the future. Responses for this were more varied than any of the other questions, with only one of them cited by more than 10% of the entire sample. At 11%, the highest percentage of women were interested in entrepreneurship courses, or some kind of training on how to start/run their own businesses.

Their other interests included specific skills development or technical trade classes (such as medical assistants, paraprofessionals, etc.), legal and/or immigration services, computer classes, and advanced level English courses. (Note: While some Centers do provide these services, not all services are available at all Centers). In general, respondents felt that the HWRCs were doing a very good job at meeting the current needs of their clientele and surrounding communities.



Note: Multiple answer question

DREAMS & ASPIRATIONS



We closed out our focus group discussions looking to the future by asking participants what their aspirations and goals were for themselves and/or their families. In line with much of what has been stated previously in this report, 29% of them said their top priority or goal was to be proficient in English. This was the most common response among the participants. Other responses included (from the next most common response to the least): owning a home, advancing their education, obtaining a stable job or career opportunity, attaining legal status in the US, owning a business, being able to provide educational opportunities for their children, bringing family over from their home countries, and traveling back home to visit family. Here are some responses, in their own words:

DREAMS & ASPIRATIONS

——— *“Mi sueño es poder seguir estudiando y en un futuro poder comprar una casa y cuidar a mis padres”.*

My dream is to continue with my studies and by a house in the future and take care of my parents.

“Tener mi propio negocio, ser una persona independiente”. ———

To have my own business, be an independent person.

——— *“Para mi ha sido muy difícil aprender el inglés, porque yo nunca fui a la escuela para aprender a leer y escribir”.*

It has been difficult for me to learn English, because I never went to school to learn how to read and write.

“Aprender inglés, tener una casita, que mis hijas fueran profesionales y poder viajar a mi país”. ———

Learn English, have a house, have my daughters be professionals, and be able to travel to my country.

DREAMS & ASPIRATIONS

————— *“Tener mejor calidad de vida aquí y mi hijo llegue a ser profesional”.*

Have a better quality of life here and have my son become a professional.

“Me gustaria hablar Inglés de manera fluida para tener mejores oportunidades laborales, trabajo 10 horas de pie y llego muy cansada”. —————

I would like to speak English fluently in order to have better job opportunities, I work 10 hours a day on my feet and I come home very tired.

————— *“Mi sueño es aprender Inglés”.*

My dream is to learn English.

“Quiero aprender Inglés, hacerme ciudadana para traer a mis padres y tener mi propia casa”. —————

I want to learn English, become a citizen in order to bring my parents over and have my own house.

DREAMS & ASPIRATIONS

————— *“Tener mi propio negocio, darle una mejor educación a mis hijos”.*

Have my own business, give my children a better education.

“Hacerme ciudadana de los Estados Unidos y tener mi casa”. —————

Become a US citizen and have my own home.

————— *“Aprender el idioma, tener un trabajo estable, tener una casa para darle una mejor calidad de vida a mis hijos”.*

Learn the language, have a stable job, have a house to give my kids a better quality of life.

“Para mí lo importante es que ellos estudien. No me importa qué carrera, pero ————— que tengan un estudio, que sepan algo diferente que nosotros”.

For me what's important is that they study. I don't care what career/field, but that they know what it is like to study, that they know/experience something different than U.S.

CONCLUSION

Based on the most recent Census data, Hispanics represent the second largest racial/ethnic group in the country, after White people, and the second fastest growing group, after Asian Americans. It is projected that by the year 2060, Hispanics will make up approximately one-third of the US population (Pérez, Sichel, Chui, Calvo, 2021). Naturally, this growth in the Hispanic population is expected to have significant economic implications at both the state and national levels. The large wage gap for Latinas not only impacts their ability to support themselves and their families, but also diminishes their ability to save for the future and limits their access to traditional credit (UNIDOS US, 2022). Addressing the barriers to employment is an important first step in helping close this gap for Latina immigrants in New Jersey. As our findings demonstrate, these women are eager to actively contribute to the economy by starting their own businesses, buying homes and cars, and investing in their children's futures. Increasing their household finances and supporting their economic security and overall wellbeing is a key factor in America's overall economic growth.

New Jersey should consider expansion of HWRCs to include additional communities. Funding that positions the existing network of HWRCs to advance their wholistic approach in providing services to clients could allow them to offer additional services that are either hard to access, or typically fall short in understanding and meeting the needs of Latina immigrants. Mental health services and support are an especially important gap to address considering the trauma histories that many immigrant women arrive to New Jersey holding, coupled with the stress of adjusting to new circumstances and making ends meet in this country. Investing in the HWRCs so that they each can grow or elevate their capacity to assist clients with housing challenges, immigration, and legal services is also critical to ensure that Latinas can move beyond survival mode and make real progress on achieving long-term economic security for themselves, their families and communities.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work was funded through the Latino Action Network Foundation. LANF's funders for this project included the New Jersey Department of Children and Families - Division on Women, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and the PSEG Foundation. Thank you to Dr. Jesselly De La Cruz for her vision and for entrusting us to conduct the research to help tell these important stories. Thanks also to Dr. Patricia Campos Medina at The Worker Institute, ILR-Cornell University, who contributed to the study design. We could not have done this work without the staff at each of the Hispanic Women's Resource Centers, who did an amazing job of recruiting participants, introducing us to the work that the centers are doing, and helping us coordinate all the moving parts to carry out the focus groups at their respective locations. We would like to especially thank Veronica Martinez at the Hispanic Family Center, Jeanette Gonzalez-Ceron at La Casa de Don Pedro, Ana Jezidzic at the Community Affairs and Resource Center, and Maria Rojas at the Morris County Organization for Hispanic Affairs for their ongoing support and assistance with this project.

A big thank you goes out to the Center for Women and Work team, including our post-doc research associate, Jocelyn Fischer, for her contributions to the report writing and editing process, Ludine Daux for her input and administrative support, and our interns Lily Manzo and Barbara Arellano for helping us with translations and citations.

Most importantly, our immense gratitude goes out to the women who took the time to participate in this study and share their stories with us. Their ability to trust us with such personal narratives is a testament to the community they have found within the HWRCs, and we hope that this research honors their experiences and helps give them a voice.

Report Authors:

Glenda Gracia-Rivera
Debra Lancaster
Maria Robles

Suggested Citation:

Gracia-Rivera, G., Lancaster, D., & Robles, M. Una Mano Amiga En Este Pais (A Helping Hand in this Country): The Role of Hispanic Women's Resource Centers in the Employment and Economic Development of Latina Immigrants in New Jersey. 2023. Center for Women and Work. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University.

REFERENCES

Bonilla-Santiago, G. (1989). Legislating Progress for Hispanic Women in New Jersey. *Social Work*, 34(3), 270-272. JSTOR. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23715312>

Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). (2019, September 17). *Community Health Workers (Promotores) | Minority Health* | CDC. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved February 23, 2023, from <https://www.cdc.gov/minorityhealth/promotores/index.html>

Center for Women and Work. (2022, December). *Fact Sheet: Unpacking the Latina Pay Gap* [PDF]. Center for Women and Work. https://smlr.rutgers.edu/sites/default/files/Documents/CWW/Unpacking_the_Latina_Pay_Gap.pdf

Joint Economic Committee Democrats. (2022, October 14). *Latina Workers Are Playing a Growing Role in the U.S. Economy, But Continue to Face Barriers to Economic Security*. Joint Economic Committee Democrats. Retrieved February 23, 2023, from https://www.jec.senate.gov/public/_cache/files/eee40829-6c42-4bcd-8e2b-e9def42e3ed2/final2-brief-on-latina-workers.pdf

La Casa de Don Pedro. (n.d.). *Overview – La Casa de Don Pedro*. La Casa de Don Pedro. Retrieved February 28, 2023, from <http://www.lacasanwk.org/overview>

Lancaster, D., Rodgers, Y., Daux, L., Gracia-Rivera, G., Park, S. R., & Deitch, N. (2021, October). *Latina Wage Gap in New Jersey: Where Are We Now?* (E. Avila, Trans.) [PDF]. Center for Women and Work. https://smlr.rutgers.edu/sites/default/files/Documents/CWW/Publications/LatinaWageGapNJ_IssueBrief_Oct2021.pdf

MHP Salud. (n.d.). *Who Are Community Health Workers?* MHP Salud. Retrieved February 23, 2023, from <https://mhpsalud.org/our-chw-initiatives/community-health-workers/>

New Jersey Institute for Social Justice. (2022). *“Making the Two New Jerseys One: Closing the \$300,000 Racial Wealth Gap in the Garden State.”*

Pérez, L., Sichel, B., Chui, M., & Calvo, A. P. (2021, December 9). *The economic state of Latinos in America: The American dream deferred*. McKinsey & Company. Retrieved February 23, 2023, from <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/sustainable-inclusive-growth/the-economic-state-of-latinos-in-america-the-american-dream-deferred>

Schneider, D., Harknett, K., & Collins, M. (2020, January). *Working in the Service Sector in New Jersey*. The Shift Project. Retrieved February 28, 2023, from <https://shift.hks.harvard.edu/working-in-the-service-sector-in-new-jersey/>
Small, L., & Lancaster, D. (2022). *The Status of Women in New Jersey: An Intersectional Lens on Women, Work, and the COVID-19 Pandemic*. The Center for Women and Work and New Jersey State Policy Lab. Retrieved from <https://policylab.rutgers.edu/projects/>

UNIDOS US. (2022, December). *Addressing the Latina Wage Gap: A Necessary Step for Our Nation's Economic Prosperity*. UNIDOS US. https://unidosus.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/unidosus_nationalpartnershipforwomenandfamilies_addressingthelatinawagegap.pdf

Zundl, E., & Lancaster, D. (2020, January). *Always “On Duty”: Women's Schedules in New Jersey's Retail, Food Service, and Logistics Industries*. The Center for Women and Work. https://smlr.rutgers.edu/sites/default/files/Documents/CWW/Publications/fairschedules_cww_jan2020.pdf