

Increasing Services to Hispanic Immigrants in Connecticut

Committee 2

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Abstract

This paper presents a plan for ways in which Connecticut public libraries can better serve the local Hispanic immigrant population. The project would form partnerships with local immigrant advocacy groups, schools, and social and religious community organizations. During the Community Analysis part of the project, the local public library would work with these groups to better determine the precise needs of the local Hispanic immigrant community. Following the community analysis, the library would continue to work with local organizations to provide services such as bilingual staff/volunteers, Spanish versions of the OPAC and website, ESL classes, employment and computer skills classes in Spanish, and reference materials in Spanish.

By involving the local immigrant community and organizations in developing and maintaining services, the library can help create and enhance the sense of mutual respect and trust necessary for this proposal to succeed.

Mission

Our mission is to increase library usage among Hispanic immigrants in Connecticut, especially for educational and career related purposes. This increased access will help Hispanic immigrants to reach their career and educational goals. To accomplish this, Hispanic immigrants will be taught English and computer skills at the library. Community volunteers will work to carry out this program.

General Characteristics of the Group

For hundreds of years, the United States has been welcoming immigrants from all over the world. People from many nations come to Connecticut in pursuit of freedom and better opportunities. In the beginning of the 21st century, Hispanic immigrants are one of the major immigrant groups in Connecticut. Hispanic immigrants, as any other immigrants, believe that they can achieve the American Dream through hard work. Most of them want to find a better place to raise their families; some come to America to earn money, in order to financially support their families left back in their home countries. In reality, Hispanic immigrants often face issues which do not allow them to pursue their dreams and meet their expectations. There are many key reasons why Hispanic immigrants are not able to achieve those dreams; for example low level of education, low income, the language barrier, cultural shock, and for many of them the inability to achieve legal status.

According to the U. S. Census Bureau (2009), the population of Connecticut was approximately 3,500,000. The total population of Hispanics in Connecticut was 424,000 which makes them the state's largest minority group. At present, more than 12 percent of Connecticut residents are of Hispanic or Latino origins and 28 percent of Hispanics are foreign born (Pew Hispanic Center, 2011). According to the Census, the numbers of Hispanic immigrants increases every day due to unstable economic situation in their home countries. "Between 1990 and 2000, the number of Mexican and Central American immigrants in Connecticut grew by 310 percent, and the number of South Americans grew by 125 percents" (Capps, Cook, Fortuny, Henderson & Zuckerman, 2005). For instance, the Hispanic population grew so significantly in Hartford that it outnumbered African Americans (Busemeyer & De La Torre, 2008).

One of the main issues that Hispanic immigrants have been facing is their legal status in the country. There are thousands of legal Hispanic immigrants in Connecticut, but it is also estimated that there about 39,000 illegal immigrants in the state (U. S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2000). The difference between the legal and illegal immigrant is that the legal immigrant has a work permit and is allowed to be a legal resident of the state by having a "green card". In contrast, illegal immigrants are not permitted to work in the state because they do not have a work permit; a large group of illegal immigrants work towards changing their legal status. Legal and illegal immigrants, like other residents, are granted public library services in the towns and cities that they live in.

Whether Hispanic immigrants are legally or illegally in Connecticut, they live difficult lives by having a low level of education. According to the Census (2000), about 55 percent of Mexican and Central American immigrants (age 25 and over) did not have a high school

diploma, and only 10 percent of Mexican/Central American immigrants had four-year college degrees (Capps et al., 2005). The low level of education among Hispanic immigrants translates to low income. The 2008 Census states, the median income for Hispanic immigrants in Connecticut is \$ 24,951 (Pew Hispanic Center, 2011). Hispanic immigrants are the poorest immigrants; 30 percent of Hispanics (ages 17 and younger) and 18 percent (ages 18-64) live in poverty (Pew Hispanic Center, 2011).

Another reason why Hispanic immigrants are one of the most disadvantaged groups in Connecticut is the language barrier. Seventy-seven percent of Hispanic households in Connecticut speak “other than only English” at home (Pew Hispanic Center, 2011). Since many Hispanic immigrants have difficulties with English, they are limited in the job market and they cannot achieve higher education in the U. S. The language barrier also prevents young children of Hispanic immigrants from getting better results in schools. Christopher Clouet, a former superintendent at New London Public Schools, explains that many Hispanic immigrants’ children do not speak English well which causes low test scores. Clouet claims, “It is a challenge in the sense that many of the recent arrivals don’t speak English as a first language. It takes a little bit more time to get accustomed to the language” (Busemeyer & De La Torre, 2008). In short, the language barrier prevents Hispanic immigrants from taking advantage of more opportunities in schools, work, or government benefits.

Because many Hispanic immigrants do not speak English fluently and have low incomes, they lack computing skills as well. In today’s world, it is necessary for everyone to know at least basic computer skills to do almost anything. From finding ESL classes on a local library website, to searching government websites about available benefits - being computer savvy is beneficial

to anyone. Therefore, Hispanic immigrants are one of the largest and the most disadvantaged groups in Connecticut and they are in a great need of community support.

Involvement of Community

Community involvement can play a significant role in improving the lives of Hispanic immigrants living in Connecticut. The services, we are planning to offer, require considerable help from the Hispanic and non-Hispanic community. Since we are planning to provide ESL and GED classes, and jobs/ computer skills trainings, we will rely on the help of adult, student, and teenage volunteers. For instance, in the case of English as a Second Language classes, we will look for adult volunteers preferably from the Hispanic community to teach ESL to Hispanic immigrants. Likewise, we will encourage college students majoring in ESL and Bilingual Education to practice their skills by teaching these courses. Besides that, we will contact Hispanic organizations which can donate ESL textbooks.

In case of providing computer classes, which will cover basics of computers, like the usage of Microsoft Office, sending and receiving emails, use of the Internet, and familiarity with online searches (Employment opportunities, immigration services, and/or government benefits). These classes are planned to be held in the afternoons and evenings as well. Since many high schools have community service requirement for graduation, we are planning to form a partnership with local high school where preferably Spanish speaking students will work as volunteers. Our plan is that students will be available to volunteer for afternoon classes; adults

and college student volunteers would take over in the evenings. Also, we will encourage the library staff to learn the Spanish language which would make the library a more desirable place for Hispanic immigrants.

To inspire volunteers from the Hispanic community and make them more interested in our program, we will organize events which are important for Hispanic people, for instance a Cinco de Mayo. Events that would provide activities closely connected to this holiday, e. g. story time in English and Spanish, watching movie about this holiday, discussions, and arts and crafts inspired by this holiday, etc. Events and celebration of important Hispanic and non-Hispanic holidays in library, would unite the Hispanic and non-Hispanic community; the library will become one of the most important centers of the community and it will definitely inspire Hispanic and non-Hispanic people to volunteer and help the community.

Outline

The Hispanic population has several challenges. One is a low education level. Fifty-five percent of immigrants from Mexico and Central America do not have a high school diploma, as opposed to fourteen percent of the people born in Connecticut. Two thirds of this population is of Limited English Proficiency (LEP). They are the poorest group of immigrants with a third living in poverty. Higher education leads to higher incomes. For example, in 1999 immigrants with a college degree earned twenty-three dollars an hour versus eleven dollars an hour for those without a high school diploma. (Capps, Zuckerman, Henderson, Cook, and Fortuny, 2005)

A study on the use of libraries showed Hispanic households with children were the least likely to use a library for a school project and Hispanic households were more likely than non-Hispanic white households to use the library for computers (Glander, & Dam, 2007).

From these statistics the most pressing information needs of the Hispanic population seem to be improving their ability to speak and understand English and increasing their educational levels, such as getting a GED. They also need more access to computers and may not be able to communicate with the librarians effectively to get the help they need.

Plan for Community Analysis

To do a comprehensive community analysis, it is advisable to conduct both interviews and a survey. In order to reach community members who may not use the library, the library can work collaboratively with immigrant and community organizations. Volunteers might also be available through high school community service programs. Materials would be provided in both Spanish and English.

Interviews would allow for more control over questions, more flexibility, and permit detailed feedback from respondents whose literacy is limited. Surveys would allow for more anonymous replies and would require less manpower. In both cases, volunteers or staff would need to be trained to administer surveys/interviews in a professional, polite, and friendly manner. By using both methods, we ensure that we will receive a fuller spectrum of responses.

The survey would look at how frequently community members make use of the library, how the library succeeds and fails in meeting their information needs, and what other resources they use to meet their needs.

Sample Survey Questions:

1. How frequently do you use the public library:
 - a) 2+ times a week
 - b) Once a week
 - c) Once a month
 - d) Rarely
 - e) Never

2. What do you use the public library for?
 - a) Answers for questions
 - b) Reading for entertainment
 - c) Internet access
 - d) Help with schoolwork
 - e) Literacy materials
 - f) Programming for adults
 - g) Programming for children
 - h) Other

3. Are any of the following reasons you do NOT go to the library?
 - a) Building is confusing
 - b) Staff is not helpful or hostile

c) No need

d) Other

4. When you need help finding something out, where do you look?
5. Which currently offered library services would you be likely to use?
6. Which library services would you like to see offered?

Survey options should be refined following two or three preliminary interviews.

Preliminary interviews should be conducted with community leaders or with contacts in partner organizations. In general, interviews will ask the same questions but seek more depth in answers.

Analysis of surveys and interviews will allow for creating a specific plan to meet the community needs. Interviews may also help identify community members interested in volunteering to assist with programs and projects that are developed.

Suggested Programs

The following are some possible programs which can be implemented to help meet the goals of this project. Which programs are implemented would be determined by what the community analysis shows to be the specific needs of the community and what the library can support in terms of funding, resources, and volunteers.

1. Storytime (overlap with classes to help alleviate need for childcare)
2. ESL and GED classes
3. Job/computer skills training
4. Increased materials in Spanish

5. Spanish version of library website and card catalog
6. Bilingual volunteers/staff
7. Directions for computers and services written in Spanish

Assumptions

We have made some assumptions about Hispanic immigrants in the United States. Whenever possible these assumptions were supported by statistics. Some other assumptions have been based on our own experiences. Our first assumption was that there is low library usage among Hispanic Immigrants. This is supported by statistics on the ALA website showing that Hispanics used libraries less than other ethnic groups (ALA, 2010). However, the statistics did not say if the Hispanics surveyed were immigrants, born in the United States, or a mixture of the two.

In order to have community involvement in a program that will increase the number of Hispanic immigrants who use the library, we have decided to involve volunteers from that community. Teen volunteers were suggested in addition to adult volunteers because we have assumed that teenagers will not have to work as many hours as adults. One concern that was expressed during our meetings was that Hispanic immigrant adults might have to work too many hours to volunteer for a library program. If they are in low paying jobs, immigrants may be forced to work multiple jobs in order to support their families. Another reason why it may be easier to get teenage volunteers is that many high schools have volunteer requirements for graduation. Also, Catholic teenagers have service hour requirements as part of their

Confirmation classes. This assumes that many Hispanic immigrants are Catholic. Assuming that Hispanic immigrants are Catholic could continue a bias; but in this case, we know that the Peruvian Consulate encourages its citizens living in the United States to contact Catholic diocese for assistance (Consulado General del Perú). The evenings and weekends seemed like the best times for us to offer programs such as ESL classes because people would come when they are not working. Tutors from the community could be supplemented with college students who are studying ESL or bilingual education since we assume that they are familiar with the field.

If we offered written and recorded materials in Spanish at the library, Hispanic immigrants could expand their skills before learning English. This assumes that they are able to read Spanish and understand the books, periodicals, and other written materials that are purchased.

We have come up with our proposals believing that most Hispanic immigrant families in Connecticut will be learning English as a new language or will be bilingual families. This has been suggested by the statistics that we found at Pew Hispanic Center (2011) saying that 77% of Hispanic households do not “speak only English.”

We are assuming that some Hispanic immigrant families in Connecticut will include small children that mothers will be unable or unwilling to leave at home while volunteering or taking ESL classes. That is why we have suggested offering babysitting or story hours during ESL classes and library programs so that more people can attend.

Point of failure

The three biggest points of failure are; a lack of volunteers, a lack of funding and a lack of room. Our plan depends heavily on volunteers and if there is a low response to the call for volunteers, but a high response to the need, than libraries will not be able to provide sufficient help for their patrons. Covering the cost of services, translations and expanding the Spanish language collection may be more than some libraries can afford, especially in these tough economic times. Libraries may have to choose which services they will provide and spread costs over time. Actual space to provide ESL and GED classes may be tight in some smaller libraries where there are no extra rooms. These libraries may not be able to hold classes, but set aside tables for tutors instead and facilitate the meeting of tutors and their students.

There are other problems. Some libraries may require forms of identification to get a library card that illegal immigrants may not have, preventing them from using library services. Library hours may not be long enough to serve Hispanic immigrants who may work long hours. There also may be a lack of interest in the programs we suggest and other programs that service immigrants many feel that libraries are stepping on their toes. In rural areas, potential patrons may not have transportation. These are problems that individual libraries will have to overcome.

Goals

1. To increase library usage among Hispanic immigrants in Connecticut.
2. To improve Hispanic immigrants ability to find a job or a better job
3. To support Hispanic immigrants in their educational goals
4. To help Hispanic immigrants improve their English
5. To help Hispanic immigrants improve their computer skills

Objectives

1. Add books in Spanish to the library's collection so that Spanish speakers can continue learning before mastering English
2. Have bilingual and Spanish-speaking volunteers
3. Have staff with knowledge of Spanish or Hispanic cultures to better communicate with patrons
4. Translate instructions for how to obtain a library card to Spanish
5. Translate the library's website to Spanish
6. Translate the interface for the library catalog to Spanish
7. Create a list of commonly asked questions and answers in Spanish with the English translations alongside so that Spanish-speaking patrons can communicate with English-speaking library staff
8. Have tutors available to teach computer skills
9. Make Hispanic immigrants aware of GED programs
10. Offer ESL classes
11. Purchase materials for the library collection that will support local ESL programs

Timeline

The progress made towards reaching our goals will be evaluated every five years. A lesser interim evaluation will take place after the first one or two years that the programs are being run so that corrections can be made. All the translations necessary to carry out our objectives should be completed after two years.

Measurement

We will measure if library use among Hispanic immigrants has increased by counting the number of Hispanic immigrants who have gotten library cards. This will be done using an

anonymous survey when patrons apply for library cards. More education and improved English and computer skills will assist Hispanic immigrants in getting better jobs. We will measure improvement in these areas by giving placement tests when participants first begin attending ESL classes or meeting with a tutor and giving placement tests periodically or at the end of classes. We will show increased education level by asking people who were tutored for their GED to inform us when they receive their GED.

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