



2018 Annual Report

Piecing Together Immigrant Integration

The Latino community faces a complex and growing set of integration barriers to life in the United States. In Illinois, and specifically on Chicago's southwest side, limited English proficiency, lagging education levels, low income, uneven access to health insurance, and a severe housing burden are challenging this population's effective integration into the larger community.

Through the lens of learning English, **PODER's** principal goal is to put students on a **path to self-sufficiency**. We accomplish this through a strategy that views each dimension of integration – economic, civic, cultural, social, and political – as individual pieces to a jigsaw puzzle. PODER's programs, including our multi-level **Integrated English**, intensive **Customer Service** training, the **Oprima-1** workforce development program, and an adult basic education course (**Plaza Comunitaria**), help piece together the immigrant integration puzzle. Each piece is vital to our students' success in improving language acquisition, gaining marketable job skills, fostering civic engagement, increasing digital literacy, and cultivating empowering life skills.

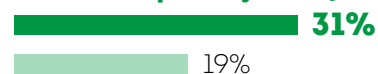
Immigrant Integration Barriers

The below graphs illustrate the disparity in common socio-economic indicators for Latino households on Chicago's southwest side (top bar) compared to entire Chicago population (bottom bar).

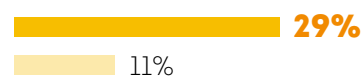
Limited English proficiency



Household poverty resulting from under-employment



No health insurance



Data from City of Chicago's "Healthy Chicago 2.0" plan



PODER

Partnerships Complete the Puzzle

PODER tackles immigrant integration barriers through a partnership-driven approach that allows us to both deepen and widen our impact. These collaborations with a multifaceted group of stakeholders enhance our programs and provide wrap-around services to students to more fully integrate them socially, economically, civically, and culturally in Chicago.

Each individual highlighted below helps solve the puzzle by contributing an important piece to immigrant integration. As you will read, their willingness to dedicate expertise and organizational support to PODER has been essential in the successful impact numbers our students achieved this year – proof there is power in partnerships.

Laurie Sedio

**Executive Director
Metropolitan Family Services (MFS) Midway Center**

When PODER moved from Pilsen to the Midway Airport Area, Laurie Sedio was there to welcome us to the neighborhood. Through Sedio’s leadership at MFS, she helped facilitate the opening of two PODER satellite sites since January 2017 – one at MFS’ Head Start Center and one at Stevenson Elementary School. In addition to geographic expansion, our students benefit from MFS’ wrap-around services, including parenting programs and emotional wellness services.

Surabhi Jain

**Director of Adult Education & Workforce Development
UnidosUS**

Surabhi Jain first began working with PODER in 2013 through her role as a UnidosUS Program Manager. Jain’s technical assistance was essential when PODER made key organizational updates, including shifting to an immigrant integration framework, developing our Oprima-1 workforce development program, and expanding blended learning and technology access across programs. Through grants, capacity development, and relationship-building opportunities, UnidosUS has been an important partner affecting change for Chicago’s Latino community.

Sergio Velazquez

**Senior Personal Banker
First American Bank**

Sergio Velazquez, a senior personal banker at First American Bank, came to PODER with his colleagues to lead financial literacy role-playing workshops, focusing on banking skills such as how to open a bank account and make withdrawals and deposits. First American Bank also provided PODER with funding to assist in developing updated literacy curriculum to be used in our Integrated English classrooms. This revised and contextualized curriculum is reaching hundreds of our students to strengthen and advance their economic stability.

Anna Valencia

**City Clerk
City of Chicago**

As Chicago’s City Clerk, Anna M. Valencia has made it a priority to make government accessible to all Chicagoans. This commitment resulted in Chicago’s first municipal ID card, the CityKey, a government-issued identification card available to every Chicagoan – regardless of age, income, health or immigration status. In addition to being a form of ID, the CityKey serves as a library, public transit, and prescription medication discount card. PODER partnered with the City Clerk’s office and the Chicago Citywide Literacy Coalition to pre-screen 130+ applicants and host a mobile printing site where we helped more than 300 Chicagoans, many of whom were PODER students, obtain a CityKey and gain the access and dignity that accompanies government-issued ID.

Jose Ruiz

**Human Resources Director
Alivio Medical Center**

On behalf of Alivio Medical Center, Jose Ruiz engaged with PODER this year at our first bilingual job fair. Current and former students had 1:1 interviews with employers who were looking to attract diverse new talent or had hard-to-fill job openings. Every student who participated in the job fair received at least one employment offer. Ruiz hired two PODER students to work at Alivio Medical Center as bilingual Patient Registration Representatives. Employer engagement collaborations are essential to advancing our students’ economic security.

Imelda Salazar

**Community Organizer
Southwest Organizing Project**

Imelda Salazar, a community organizer with over a decade of experience, is deeply connected to Chicago’s Latino community. One of her primary organizing areas focuses on immigration rights. Given the increasingly unfriendly climate towards immigrants in the U.S., PODER wanted to address our students’ concerns directly and quickly. In collaboration with Imelda and SWOP, we implemented multiple “Know Your Rights” workshops to 132 students, helping them feel safer and better equipped to handle immigration-related issues.

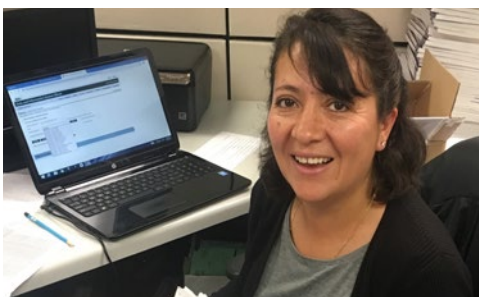
Maria del Rocio Sanchez has always been committed to her education. Growing up in a Mexican farming village, her school taught only to the 8th grade. Maria was determined to continue her learning, so she moved in with her grandparents to attend high school. Though she had aspirations to go to college, the financial reality of having nine siblings made it impossible. It was then, in 1995, that Maria made the life-changing decision to leave her home in search of a brighter future.

Once in Chicago, Maria found employment, working for 17 years as a currency exchange cashier. While this job fell short of meeting Maria's career goals, it was stable income to support her family. Five years ago, with one child in high school and the other in college, Maria resumed her educational journey. This May, Maria graduated with her Associate's Degree in Business Administration from Daley Community College.

Maria didn't stop there. Recognizing that limited English proficiency was a barrier to her earning potential, she began searching for a place to study English and found PODER. Maria recently completed Integrated English

Level 4, which focuses on refining conversation skills and advanced grammar concepts. Maria also completed our Customer Service training course, where she honed job readiness and workplace communication skills. In September, Maria accepted a customer service representative position again at a local currency exchange. This

time, as a result of her new degree and improved English, she was hired directly into a mid-level role. And although Maria is back in the workplace full-time, she remains connected to PODER by volunteering weekly. In her words, "this is a way to give back to an organization that helped me make great strides in a short period of time."



Maria came to the U.S. seeking a better future than what was available to her in Mexico. Since arriving here, her successes have only come through years of determination, hard work, and placing a high value on the importance of education. From working long hours to provide for her family to taking advantage of educational programs and participating in civil society, Maria is an invaluable community member. Maria is proof that an empowered, engaged immigrant makes our communities stronger and more vibrant.

2018 Impact Analysis

497 served in 2018

140 met with our Career Counselor to set academic and professional goals

72% gained a literacy level after one academic trimester

184 improved employability skills with job development courses and workshops

385 participated in 20 civic engagement activities

59 students secured employment or improved quality of current employment



PODER Receives Top Honor from UnidosUS

Culminating seven years of close collaboration, UnidosUS awarded PODER its prestigious Affiliate of the Year award. Sponsored by the Ford Motor Company Fund, this national award recognizes a community-based organization whose partnership has helped serve Latinos and empower them to achieve meaningful change in their community. PODER will leverage the award to strengthen, deepen, and expand our immigrant integration services on Chicago's southwest side.



>>> View photos from the UnidosUS annual conference at poderworks.org