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Memorandum

To: Our Funding Partners and Community Stakeholders
From: Linda X. Tortolero, President & CEO
Subject: Current Status of MLEA's Parent Support Program
Date: May 11, 2020

As a funding partner and community stakeholder of Mujeres Latinas en Acción, I would like to apprise you of COVID-19's impact on the daily programmatic activities, staff and survivors.

Please do not hesitate to reach out to me at ltortolero@mujereslat.org or Gil Zamora, Director of Development at gzamora@mujereslat.org with any questions or ideas you may have.

Office Closures

Until Friday, March 20th, Mujeres' Pilsen headquarters and our North Riverside remained open from Monday – Friday 9AM – 5PM. Our Brighton Park satellite office, which is located within a federal qualified health clinic complex, closed on March 17th to reduce the risk of exposure. Our staff immediately informed families and have stayed in contact ever since. Signage at our Brighton Park also directed potential walk-in participants to our other two sites and Mujeres' phone line where they can be connected to our program staff was also listed.

After the Governor's "Stay at Home" executive order came into effect, Mujeres all physical offices closed, effective March 21, 2020. We posted information on the front doors with our telephone number as well as Mujeres' main site phone number. Once the order is lifted, Mujeres leadership anticipates that social distancing practices in the office will continue. Mujeres' offices will reopen with minimal staff physically present to attend to the needs of walk-ins. We will look to the guidance of our government and health officials for best practices.

Staff Transition to Telework

After the Governor's "Stay at Home" order, all Parent Support Program staff began to work remotely, answer calls and connecting callers with resource and offering emotional support. All staff have downloaded the 8x8 phone application on their cellphones which forwards calls from our office phone system. It also allows the staff to call participants or colleagues from our office phone system. This allows all personal phone numbers to stay private.

Service Impact

While our physical offices have closed, Mujeres has strived to continue providing our vital, culturally-competent support to help families heal and thrive. This has led our Parent Support staff to key in and increase focus on case management. The parents and families we work represent the most vulnerable.



Latinos have surpassed all other racial and ethnic groups in confirmed COVID cases in Illinois, yet many lack health insurance, paid leave, or paid sick time. The southwest side of Chicago (such as Brighton Park, West Lawn, and Little Village) the Latino suburbs of West Suburban Cook County have been hit particularly hard. Of the 1,700 patients tested by our partner, Esperanza Health Centers by the end of April, 53% are positive. A needs assessment done of our clients, found that 63% have had their employment negatively impacted, more than 56% do not qualify for unemployment insurance, 37% said they were most concerned about how to pay rent. Below are the pivots and alterations we have currently made to our Parent Support program:

- *Continued coordination with partners.* By the end of April, 90% of the new 30 families we've enrolled in our program were direct referrals from Department of Children & Family Services (DCSF). We are also in touch with other partners organization, informing them so families who are looking for parental support and education.
- *Case Management* Our Parents Support Staff had noted the increase in anxiety and distress that parents are confronting due to this public health and economic crisis. In addition to helping parents obtain essential supplies and financial aid (more on that below), staff have been prioritizing helping parents focus on their mental health. In addition to be trained counselors, they are also certified in Mental Health First Aid. Our case management also extends into the Governor's directive that family advocacy centers contact the alumni youth who have left DCFS's care within the last 6 months and perform a well-being check. Our staff assure that they are in a safe living situation and we render assistance to the youth, including referrals to community resources.
- *Individual Parenting Classes* Since the suspension of psycho-educational parent support groups, the parent staff has decided that one-on-one education sessions. Session topics include parent limitation and responsibilities, child abuse and neglect, early child development, peer influence and gang prevention, loss issues, identity formation, communication, positive discipline practices and anger management.
- *Individual Parenting Counseling Sessions* – Our free individual parenting counseling for 10-week sessions, with a psycho-educational, a culturally-competent lens, and an option to extend. We have moved these individual counseling to tele-counseling, currently via phone calls.
- *Exploring tele-group session.* As explained, we are conducting our education sessions via one-on-one phone sessions. We are currently exploring tele-group sessions. We want to make sure that if we select a tele-platform, it is accessible and useful to the community members and it abides by standards of confidentiality.

Once the “Stay at Home” executive order is lifted, Mujeres leadership will consider how best to commence activities that have been suspended while practicing social distancing. Understandably, these activities may need to be adjusted to best meet the needs of our participants while keeping everyone safe and healthy.

Support During COVID19: The stress of the pandemic is requiring that our staff provide emotional support to parents well as provide information about crucial resources available to the community, such as food, medicine, hygiene and sanitation supplies. *The demand for support to cover our community's*



basic human needs is immense. Mujeres was fortunate to receive first round grant funding (\$25,000) for cash assistance with the Chicago Community Coronavirus Responsiveness Fund. This funding has already been distributed and we hope to secure another grant soon. Mujeres has quickly seized on any other opportunities to provide cash assistance or gift cards for our families many of whom are undocumented and highly vulnerable for multiple reasons. We also have received \$25,000 from the Illinois Immigration Funder Collaborative to support suburban, undocumented individuals and families. Mujeres will be looking to support increased communications capacity to assure the most vulnerable in our community know and understand the resources and referrals we can provide in this crucial time.

Vicarious Trauma

Before COVID-19, Mujeres had begun to address the self-care needs of our staff including encouraging the use of sick time for mental wellbeing and a new employee assistance program that provides up to 5 mental health counseling sessions. Yet, COVID-19 affects everyone, and Mujeres leadership will be continuously mindful of our staff's experiences with vicarious trauma over the pandemic's course. It is our position that our funding partners should also consider supporting the needs of personnel. Survivors have reported an increase in feeling isolated, without their normal support systems, leaving them vulnerable to depression and other mental health struggles. The stress this pandemic is likely to increase the challenges our staff face as they work help survivors find healing.