

The Valuable Impact of Common National and Local Tables

I came to CLUES – Comunidades Latinas Unidas En Servicio (Latino Communities United in Service) three years ago to help lead social and economic inequities affecting Latino and immigrant communities in Minnesota. After 17 years in Philanthropy, I made the transition to the non-profit sector because it is through the work of on-the-ground nonprofits that innovative social impact happens. Working at CLUES I'm able to translate policies and resources into viable services and program opportunities for clients and communities.

CLUES is Minnesota's largest Latino-led agency with headquarter offices on the East Side of Saint Paul – only a few blocks from Metropolitan State University. Since 1981, we have concentrated on eliminating barriers and providing access and opportunities for Latino and immigrant families. In my role as President of CLUES and along with 90 staff and over 700 volunteers, we serve as a conduit to promoting access to housing, financial assets, healthy neighborhoods, and overall family wellbeing. We provide direct services to over 12 thousand clients annually through one-stop-shop service models in both Minneapolis and Saint Paul and a few rural communities.

I was recently appointed to the Board of the National Council of La Raza (NCLR), the nation's largest civil rights organization advocating for Latinos and also serve on the Board of the National Association of Latino Asset Builders (NALCAB). Serving on these boards helps me advance Minnesota and the Midwest's agendas around– access to healthcare, education, employment, economic integration, and empowerment of Latinos across the country.

When I participate in national conversations regarding social and economic inequities I am often reminded of the high impact that local on-the-ground organizations have. On the East Side of Saint Paul or Lake Street in Minneapolis, for example, organizations like CLUES help advance neighborhood initiatives for low income people of color and the opportunity to pilot innovative models that promote the mental, health, and economic wellbeing of families and children. Being with others at the table at the national and local levels and connecting common agendas and advocacy is invaluable.

Overall, our local efforts are connected to national impact as much as national efforts are informed by local on-the-ground work. Today 91 percent of Minnesota Latino children under 18 are native born. Nationally, an average of 900,000 Latino youth turn 18 every year, and within 20 years, one in three American youth will be Latino. It is critical for us to lift the voices of Latinos at the local, Midwest, and national tables. CLUES is poised to connect national resources to Minnesota families and neighborhoods locally. We aim to improving policies, addressing institutional barriers, and increasing access and resources for Latino families so that they can succeed in raising their families.

Just as Metropolitan State University is expanding its physical presence on Seventh Street on the East Side of Saint Paul, CLUES is also getting ready to double the size of its current headquarters building. New investment in the neighborhood will leverage economic development currently underway on Seventh Street. For CLUES an expanded infrastructure will expand our capacity to serve more Latino elders, increase workforce development and skill-building programs, and expand English, Civics, and education classes for New Americans from throughout the East Metro area.

Metropolitan State University and CLUES are already landmarks for the neighborhood and strong resources for families. Together we can create better opportunities and build innovative collaboration that lift communities and the neighborhood for generations to come.

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