

LET MY PEOPLE STAY:
A NONPROFIT'S ROLE IN IMMIGRANT LIVES

A Capstone Project Presented in Partial Fulfillment
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ABSTRACT

This project draws on research that I conducted May to August 2019 with a nonprofit organization, La Casita Center, that provides services to the Hispanic immigrant community in Louisville KY. Despite what appears to be a bleak time in our country for immigrants and immigration reform, there is hope found in the organizations that are working to support and fill the gap that the national government has left. I draw on interviews and participant observation research conducted with staff at La Casita Center to

1. Analyze how La Casita staff decide which resources and projects to implement.
2. Consider how the current political climate has affected La Casita Center and the resources and projects they choose to implement.
3. Examine staffs' perspectives on how receptive the broader Louisville community is to the immigrant community that La Casita Center serves and whether that has changed in recent time.

La Casita Center provides a variety of programs and resources to its clients, including a legal clinic, childcare, summer camps, ESL and Spanish literacy classes, themed workshops, a food pantry, diaper bank and soup kitchen, along with case management and individual advocacy. The constant threat resulting from anti-immigrant policies and rhetoric require that organizations be vigilant in making sure they are implementing useful resources for the immigrant community they serve, and I present an analysis of these services using interview and observation data.

I dedicate this thesis to my parents, Juan and Gladys Villa, who crossed borders so I could have the opportunities I have today and inspired the meaning behind this thesis. I dedicate this thesis to my sister, Karina Villa, who has been my greatest role model and encouraged me throughout this entire process. Also, I dedicate this work to La Casita Center—Somos un círculo.

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CONTENTS

| | |
|----------------------|-----|
| Abstract..... | ii |
| Acknowledgments..... | iv |
| Vita..... | v |
| Section One..... | 1 |
| Section Two..... | 24 |
| Section Three..... | 56 |
| Section Four..... | 80 |
| Conclusions..... | 93 |
| References..... | 102 |

SECTION ONE

Introduction

This project examines what programs and resources best support immigrant communities. More specifically, I conducted research with La Casita Center, a nonprofit organization that serves the Hispanic immigrant community in Louisville, Kentucky. La Casita Center provides a variety of programs and resources to its clients, including a legal clinic, childcare, summer camps, ESL and Spanish literacy classes, themed workshops, a food pantry, diaper bank and soup kitchen, along with case management and individual advocacy. This research project contributes to existing scholarly research on the topic of immigrant community needs (Gilroy et al. 2014; Greenwald and Zajfen 2017; Zhou 2009), while also contributing specifically to research focused on Hispanic immigrants in Kentucky.

The research project builds on an internship with La Casita Center that I conducted in the summer of 2019. By focusing on the experiences and perspectives of staff who work at La Casita Center, I answered the following research questions:

1. How do staff at La Casita Center determine which programs and resources best support the needs of Hispanic immigrants in Louisville, KY?
2. In what way has the current political climate and anti-immigrant rhetoric in the United State impacted, changed, altered or reinforced the work that La Casita Center is doing?

3. How receptive is the non-immigrant Louisville community to La Casita Center's mission and has the current political climate impacted the support La Casita Center receives from the community?

Background

This project is conducted during a particularly decisive time for immigrants in the United States marked by an anti-immigrant rhetoric that has negatively impacted the lives of many immigrants. This use of hateful and racist rhetoric against immigrants is common, including by the current president. The labels and comments from the president, before and during his presidency, have fueled much of the racism that we see today. Although no one person can be solely responsible for the ignorance and hate within in our country, the use of this rhetoric by our political leaders is a catalyst that opened the floodgates to make this rhetoric common and acceptable. The stereotypes that many American believed about immigrants have turned into explicit acts of racism. Racially and ethnically charged language are being used towards immigrants, or people presumed to be immigrants, that promotes hateful action. These acts have included microaggressions, threats, and even physical violence. Particularly, the Hispanic population, who make up the largest minority group in America, have encountered incidents of fear and threats based on the assumptions of legal status that go beyond the consequences of deportation. The Pew Research Center writes that “four-in-ten Hispanics say they have experienced [...] offensive incidents in the past year because of their Hispanic background” (Lopez, Barrera, & Krogstad 2018). Further stereotypes suggest that immigrants are undeserving humans who steal jobs, who freely take from government assistance programs, and who don't give back anything they take. These

stereotypes contribute to an idea that immigrants are unworthy of being legitimate US citizens. Immigrants constantly carry the burden of their citizenship status, while living in a hostile environment.

While the current immigration crisis in the US is significant, the US has a long history of managing and regulating immigrant populations. In 1876, the US Supreme Court made the decision that immigrant regulation was a federal responsibility (“Historical Overview of Immigration Policy”). During the early 1900s, there was a great influx of immigrants coming to the US which prompted the use of the first quota system in 1921—each nationality had a quota for the number of immigrants allowed to immigrate to the US. The quota system was eventually replaced in 1965 with a preference system used to unite families. This preference system prioritized bringing in skilled immigrants, largely consisting of Asian and Latin American immigrants, but it still limited the number of visas available. The shift to the preference system reinforces ideas about who constitutes the desirable immigrant, what they could bring to the table and how they benefitted the country at the time.

The Immigration Reform and Control Act was put in place in 1986 and had two major components: amnesty and enforcement (“Historical Overview of Immigration Policy”). The act gave amnesty to undocumented immigrants after a certain amount of time residing in the US or after 90 days of agricultural work. However, the enforcement component intended to prevent future entry of illegal immigrants, including prohibiting employers to hire illegal immigrants. In 1996, the implementation of the Illegal Immigrant Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act required that more Border Patrol and Immigration and Naturalization Service agents be hired to increase border control.

Along with that, this act introduced the 287(g) program that allowed state police to enforce immigration laws. There has been no meaningful immigration reform since 1996. Viturro (2012) summarizes recent immigration policy best in saying that “since the 1970s, the United States has aggressively imposed neoliberal economic policies in order to facilitate the accumulation and movement of capital” (p. 279), and only then are immigrants seen as the slightest bit desirable. The government has failed to take action since 1996 because, between public opinion and the two political parties, there stands differences in perspective and these groups refuse to collaborate on this important issue. The national government has failed to fix the immigration system, as well as condemn hate speech. To put it into perspective, not only has the government failed to fix the system, they are using a broken immigration system to monitor and control the lives of immigrants.

Despite what appears to be a bleak time in our country for immigrants and immigration reform, there is hope found in the organizations that are working to support and fill the gap that the national government has left, particularly in meeting the various needs and providing resources and services for the immigrant community. The lack of immigration reform has required that work being done towards policy change and the integration of immigrants take place through a bottom-up effort, meaning that grassroots organizations must lay the groundwork in an attempt to influence local governments to make change. “Adopted Resolution: Supporting Comprehensive Immigration Reform” states that “local governments have been on the frontlines helping to integrate immigrants into their communities” (as cited by Rodriguez et al., p. 350). Local governments “make and implement laws that relate to immigration that are separate from federal statute”

(Rodriguez et al., p. 350), often as a response to the lack of action from federal government. Therefore, local governments are working alongside organizations to work towards integration by taking up the responsibility to care for immigrants while also being responsible for fighting against a government that imposes constant threats to immigrant's livelihood.

Community organizations provide a wide number and range of services to meet the needs of immigrants in their communities. After leaving their lives behind in pursuit of something better, immigrants often have to start from scratch and our government provides little assistance. Federal law prevents immigrants from accessing government assistance and immigrants must work their lives away to meet their needs. Even when they try their best, immigrants lack a lot of necessities. In desperate times, community organizations provide free or cheaper resources such as clothes, food, education, and health programs. Other forms of support include empowerment and advocacy. Nonprofit advocacy often means advocating for the lives of immigrants in the US and for policy change. Advocacy programs “have the opportunity and responsibility to educate” (Loyd, p. 169) about the ways in which immigrants are vital to the US, as well as the histories of oppression immigrants have endured. They also have the “opportunity and responsibility to ask the questions, and to help people figure out or through other ways to think about crime and migration, and other ways to find a solution” (Loyd, p. 169). In doing so, nonprofits begin to dismantle stereotypes and misconceptions of the “criminal” immigrant, while also calling for the need for immigration reform. The advocacy of nonprofits seeks to put in the work towards change in any way they can, including protests, letter writing and community discussions. Nonprofit organizations are working

to support immigrant needs with their services, while also changing the way immigrants have been portrayed through hateful rhetoric.

The constant threat to immigrants as a result of anti-immigrant policies and hateful rhetoric require the organizations that serve immigrant communities to ensure they are implementing resources that meet the needs of the immigrant community they serve. Undoubtedly, the responsibilities and obligations of nonprofits, place a lot of pressure on the organizations as a whole, but also on individual staff. Staff are often equally impacted as allies, friends, and part of the immigrant community themselves. Through interviews with staff and observations at La Casita Center, this research addresses what resources and programs are believed to support the immigrant community, and how the aforementioned political climate has impacted this work.

Literature Review

This literature review examines two bodies of scholarship that situate the scholarly contributions of this research project; scholarship on nonprofit organizations that provide resources and services to immigrant communities and interdisciplinary scholarship on the topic of citizenship. Taken together, I examine these two bodies of literature because they present relevant findings that situate the timeliness of my research project.

Immigrant Resources

Nonprofit organizations have provided many resources, like food, clothing, childcare, etc., to facilitate and support immigrant lives in America. Research in the area of study have focused on immigrant needs by way of looking at these specific services provided by organizations that meet needs. Two major areas of focus when it comes to

providing resources for immigrant communities are food and educational resources, with educational resources often tailored towards immigrant children. Previous research states that food insecurity runs deep in the lives of many disadvantaged groups— including immigrants—and, this research attempts to understand factors as to why that is and how it can be solved through food resources (Greenwald and Zajfen). Greenwald and Zajfen (2017) not only seek to determine the usefulness of food resources to immigrant communities, but also looks at the factors that affect the capabilities of nonprofits to provide food resources. Challenges faced by nonprofits providing food resources include concerns of program sustainability in terms of funding and cultural factors that could deter immigrants from reaching out to these programs, such as shame in accepting and needing these resources or the unavailability of the immigrant’s traditional foods (p. 182). Another study in this area (Zhou 2009) focuses on educational resources for immigrant children. This study states that immigrant parents often have little educational backgrounds and face challenges in being involved in their child’s education outside of the classroom. In order to help alleviate this need for support in an immigrant child’s education, nonprofits are able to step into immigrant communities and provide not only access to educational programs outside of the school setting, but also attempt to preserve the ethnic culture. Again, funding remains the biggest challenge faced by nonprofits working to meet immigrant needs.

Aside from food and educational resources to meet the needs of immigrants, nonprofit organizations are also implementing advocacy programs. With the ability to speak on behalf of immigrants in a united and planned front, nonprofits are making their voices loud and clear in support of immigrant rights. In “A Prison Is Not a Home,” Libal

et al. (2012) focuses on the campaign strategies of an organization known as Texans United for Families (TUFF), two of those strategies specifically involving advocacy—media advocacy and legislative advocacy. For this organization, media advocacy brought the issue of immigrant detention to the forefront of media, forcing audiences to become aware and have discussions on the issue, which in turn hopes for actions of support to be taken. Legislative advocacy works towards raising political awareness of the need for immigration reform—a change that the US government has been hesitant to make. Although these advocacy strategies have been effective in bringing awareness to the need for change, TUFF still faces a challenge in garnering public support through the question: “what’s the alternative?” (p. 261). The question posed stems from a broader societal challenge that understands immigrant through a crime-and-punishment mindset, and alternatives that have been proposed often give ICE more opportunity for surveillance.

Undeserving Citizens

The work of nonprofit organizations, despite the challenges, are extremely relevant and crucial to the lives of immigrants. There is a very distinct conversation being had when it comes to the citizenship of immigrants. Many who freely and easily possess citizenship in the US—particularly the individuals that are born with it—question immigrant methods of coming to America as they largely consist of coming here ‘illegally.’ The lack of understanding and a miseducation for why so many must use this ‘illegal’ method of entry gives rise to the anti-immigrant rhetoric we so frequently hear. The use of labels such as ‘illegal’ and ‘alien’ are branded on immigrants and thus perpetuates a process of dehumanization, allowing for a regulation of immigrants out of the country, barred from ever becoming citizens. Even when immigrants are able to

legally change their citizenship status, the label remains so entrenched in who they are that it regulates them from ever being seen as legitimate citizen—rather they are given second-class citizenship. Therefore, this is not an argument about legality as it was simply thought of to be, or masked to be. Olga Aksyutina (2012) explains this phenomenon of dehumanization in stating that “under all other laws it is the act that is illegal, but under immigration law it is the person who is illegal” (p. 108). Dehumanizing immigrants justifies the use of policing like that of scare tactics, militarization of borders, and vigilante groups that ultimately maintain white supremacy to prevent immigration (Lawston and Murillo).

The illegality that comes with being an immigrant, or being seen as an immigrant, effectively bars them from social life and, often more detrimental, it bars them from governmental support. Luibheid (2002) details the history of US immigration control through its various laws and policies that regulated sexuality, but overall, depicted what it meant to be a deserving citizen and an underserving citizen. In particular, “under the 1882 law that barred entry by anyone liable to become a public charge” (p. 5), this law framed immigrants as someone that, once in the country, would become dependent on the government for assistance. Racialization was also used in immigration control to define the characteristics between a deserving and underserving citizen. Through the Page Law and Chinese Exclusion Act, “immigration control was a key institution through which renegotiation of whiteness occurred” (Luibheid, p. 6). Certain groups of people were granted entry over others on the pure basis that they were “white,” proving that only they were deserving of citizenship and all others were underserving. Another law that framed the undeserving citizen was the Emergency Immigration Act of 1921. This act put in

place the first quota system to limit the number of immigrants that entered the US. The rationale behind this was that immigrants would not fit well into American society because they—their traditions, language, culture—were too different. Their “differences” made them undesirable and undeserving of even stepping foot into the US. Through these exclusionary measures, the immigrant is framed as an undeserving citizen because of their presumed dependency.

The idea that some immigrants are more deserving than others continues to plague our society and government, as US welfare policy has continually restricted the assistance that immigrants can get. Despite US welfare policy seemingly being beneficial to many that are underprivileged, it has historically left out entire populations of underprivileged, like immigrants. The New Deal was the beginning of federal welfare like we know it today that explicitly blocked people of color from aid (Pilon). In 1996, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act “barred many noncitizen immigrants from accessing federally funded benefits” (Singer) and for legal immigrants, restrictions are put in place for their first 5 years. These restrictions leave immigrants vulnerable. As a result, nonprofits are stepping in to fulfill a need that has been left unmet for many immigrants.

Immigrants face many challenges as they embark on a new journey to what they hope is a better life. Despite the hardships they leave behind, immigrants often face a new set of hardships as they begin their lives in America. An ideology of who is seen as deserving of becoming a citizen often prevents immigrants from ever being able to attain that status and the benefits that come with it, like social welfare. Many immigrants then face financial challenges that leave them searching elsewhere for resources to meet their

needs. Apart from financial challenges, immigrants are facing societal challenges that keep their voices and presence from being recognized as valued. Nonprofit organizations are able to situate themselves into immigrant communities and, in doing so, can identify the challenges immigrants face and meet their needs in ways that they hope will support a pursuit of a better life.

Research Questions and Objectives

For my research project, there are three key questions.

1. How do staff at La Casita Center decide which resources and projects to implement in their work to best serve their clients?
2. How has the current political climate affected La Casita Center and the work they do to support the immigrant community?
3. How receptive is the non-immigrant Louisville community to La Casita Center's mission and how has the current political climate impacted the support La Casita Center receives from the broader Louisville community?

This research considers the projects and resources that La Casita Center implements to meet the needs of the Hispanic immigrant community in Louisville, KY. With the current political climate of the US that is riddled with targeted anti-immigrant rhetoric and policies, organizations like La Casita are being impacted as they work to accommodate to the shifting needs of immigrants. Immigrant communities need food resources, educational resources, and legal resources, but more recently, the immigrant community has seen a rising need for advocacy. La Casita Center, being rooted in Louisville, KY, has provided value to the community of immigrants that can be found

there, but it reaches a wider audience as can be seen through events and day-to-day operations. This research project achieves its main objective by:

1. Analyzing how La Casita staff decide which resources and projects to implement.
2. Considering how the current political climate has affected La Casita Center and the resources and projects they choose to implement.
3. Examining staffs' perspectives on how receptive the broader Louisville community is to the immigrant community that La Casita Center serves and whether that has changed in recent time.

Methodology

I used Community-Based Participatory Action Research (CBPAR) as the methodology for conducting this research project. CBPAR is a useful methodology in social science projects that work with marginalized and/or vulnerable populations interested in action and social change. CBPAR is focused on the needs of the community and sees research as a process that is conducted *with* them, not *on* them (Kindon et al.). What that means is that the goal of CBPAR is to ensure that every participant has the opportunity to be actively involved at every stage of the research process. It is with understanding that the community and its participants have their own experiences and history that cannot be ignored (any longer) and must be used to shape the research in order for it to provide the most benefit to them, and not to the institution or researcher. In doing so, the researcher avoids any assumptions that they, or the institution, know what is best for the participants and power dynamics are addressed as they may arise. Working with participants also allows for their continued empowerment beyond the scope of the research project. Overall, CBPAR is a critical research tool that provides value to the

field of social science by allowing for beneficial social change to be made possible for marginalized communities that have long suffered oppression within our society.

CBPAR is a cyclical model, meaning that it involves constant and careful consideration of any choices made and relies on reflection and analysis throughout the project (Kindon et al.). CBPAR recognizes that changes during the project will arise and therefore does not follow a set of linear steps to get to the goal as traditional research does. According to Stoeker (2013), the components of CBPAR—planning, reflection, analysis, action—are done in a constant and circular form, and are not simply applied to the methods being used, but are applied during all phases of the project and are applicable to the individual researcher, participants, and the project’s global relevance. The reflection and analysis stage of CBPAR rely on positionality and reflexivity. Positionality asks the researcher to situate themselves in the research project, while reflexivity encourages critical examination of power dynamics and politics in research (McCorkel and Myers). CBPAR also utilizes participatory ethics, otherwise known as an “ethic of care” in critical reflection and analysis (Cahill et al.). While working with marginalized communities, it is important to recognize that, as a researcher, multiple challenges will likely occur, and in order to alleviate them, the researcher must implement practices that acknowledge the expert knowledge of participants and care for participants.

Case Study Site

I conducted my research project at La Casita Center in Louisville, Kentucky. La Casita Center is a grassroots nonprofit organization that serves the Hispanic immigrant community of Louisville. Louisville is the largest city in Kentucky, so being situated in the city allows for La Casita Center to reach a larger community, as well as contextualize

themselves to meet the needs of the immigrant community in that area through their services. The organization provides a variety of programs and resources to its clients, including a legal clinic, childcare, summer camps, ESL and Spanish literacy classes, themed workshops, a food pantry, diaper bank and soup kitchen, along with case management and individual advocacy. For my research project, I worked with and focused on the staff at La Casita Center. I completed an internship that supports my research project through the summer months. In doing so, I was able to work alongside staff in their mission to support the Hispanic immigrants of Louisville, KY.

La Casita Center employs staff who are like-minded in their support of immigrants. Many of the staff are immigrants themselves, children of immigrants, or personally know immigrants. Most of the staff speak Spanish to accommodate for the people that receive services from the organization, and they also encounter indigenous languages depending on who they are providing services to. La Casita Center and its staff use a feminist philosophy in their goal of empowering Hispanic immigrants and their families by providing a foundation for systemic change. Understanding how systemic oppression affects immigrants specifically, La Casita Center believes in implementing programs and resources that not only provide for the community on a short-term basis, but provide the tools for empowerment as a long-term effect. Despite the various titles that each staff member holds, from executive director to intern, the staff works using an egalitarian approach to decision-making. Each staff has their own projects and responsibilities, but the staff comes together as a whole in informing others, working with others, and supporting others in their overall mission. This ensures that the organization does not practice using unequal or hierarchal power dynamics and is truly working in

benefit of immigrants. By focusing on the experiences and perspectives of staff at La Casita Center, I was able to examine the programs and resources that are implemented to support immigrant communities.

Methods

To answer the project's research questions, I utilized qualitative research methods.

Interviews

I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with staff at La Casita Center. I interviewed 9 staff members. 3 of the 9 interviews were conducted in Spanish. While most of the staff are able to read, speak and understand the English language, they preferred to answer questions in Spanish. I am bilingual and was able to transcribe the interviews into English. After transcription, I was able to analyze the responses for procedures, or strategies, used to decide the programs and resources offered by the organization. Interviews with staff helped me understand the decision-making processes that occur at La Casita Center, particularly on how they implement programs and utilize resources. Additionally, interview questions focused on understanding in what way have other organizations and the people of Louisville been supportive of La Casita Center's work. In indirect ways, staff members mentioned the non-immigrant community, as well, in responses for different questions. In doing so, the staff members were able to provide insight to the level of support they feel from others.

Participant Observation

I also conducted participant observation at public events that La Casita Center hosts, as well as during their day-to-day operations. Public events that I intend to observe

include summer camps, ESL and Spanish literacy classes, themed workshops, and fundraising events. When conducting participant observation, I will be taking fieldnotes on the language that staff use to describe their programs and work, as well as the direct actions that they took part in. By examining the language and action used, I was able to see the connections being made between the work La Casita Center is doing and whether it is addressed the current political climate, or even if they felt it is necessary to do so. Language concerning motives behind certain decisions, steps, actions being taken and their relevance to politics provided the data for my second research question and objective. Donors and sponsors also attended these public events. Observing the way the staff members speak of, interact with, or address those non-immigrant community members that support their work were used to provide insight into how receptive the outside community truly is.

Validity Concern

Validity concerns for this research project are that the researcher may get caught in the research component of CBPAR and fail to incorporate action. In CBPAR projects, research can often take priority over the other components of this method, such as action. Therefore, it is important for the researcher to keep in mind that the research is used to produce knowledge in an effective and understandable way so that the knowledge is actionable (Kindon et al.). It is also important to keep in mind that, although the technicality of methods and strategies used are important, the project overall must produce action in order to have social transformation. The researcher must think beyond the research itself in ways that address what the findings are. The objectives that arise out of research must be addressed with action. Research and action must work together and

build off of one another in order to achieve social change. Within this research, the gathering of data through interviews and participants observation also incorporates action such as relationship building and recruitment.

Furthermore, to assess the validity of the methods being used, Creswell (2012) describes two strategies for validity that I utilized in my CBPAR project. The first one is prolonged engagement and persistent observation. Creswell (2012) explains that through a process of “building trust with participants, learning the culture, and checking misinformation” (p. 207), the research, and the researcher, is able to gain the validity for the methods that it needs, while still actively being involved in both the lives of the participants and in the study itself. In working alongside the staff at La Casita Center to ultimately benefit the lives of the Hispanic immigrant community in Louisville, this strategy in particular was something I focused on to present the work being done accurately and understand it in a larger sense as the impact that nonprofits can make in their communities of focus. The second strategy is clarifying researcher bias. Despite my connection to the participants— being Hispanic, a daughter of immigrants, and passionate about the work La Casita Center engages in — I must still understand and analyze what the position I am coming in with as a researcher in order to produce valid research interpretations.

Data Analysis & Evaluation

As the researcher, I undoubtedly found contradictions from my experiences and perspectives that will shape the data. In order to counteract that, it is important to engage in a “suffocating close analysis” (Kindon et al.) that attempts to constantly be on guard and aware of the impact we’re having as researchers. Self-analysis as a method will be

implicit and ongoing in providing feedback to the researcher at every stage of the project. As opposed to traditional research, the data analysis step was not a separate phase, but rather was incorporated into every stage. Data analysis was constantly done and recognized throughout the project, including through regular reflection.

For evaluation, I used the participatory evaluation method. As Stoeker (2013) describes it, “this is just a variation on the participatory action research model” (p. 157), this method aligns well with the values of CBPAR and of a research project with an overarching aim to benefit participants. Participatory evaluation is more than just participatory action research in that it “involves the related practice of popular education” (Stoeker, p. 165), meaning participants are using the project to assess the effectiveness of the project and what that means to them. The principles of this method allow for the participants to continue to shape the research beyond the project itself in evaluating its usefulness and importance to themselves. Stoeker (2013) also explains that this method can also be helpful in building “more and stronger relationships” (p. 158) which, again, takes the scope of the research beyond the project itself and into the lives of the people it matters for.

I built evaluation into each phase of the project by also using process evaluation. Rather than waiting for the outcome to evaluate the success of the project, process evaluation provides feedback more frequently and earlier in order to make necessary adjustments “before problems show up in poor outcome measures” (Stoeker, p. 160). Process evaluation also helped in understanding what action that was taken was actually effective, therefore, also helping come up with the explanation for the outcomes. To

include process evaluation, I scheduled multiple opportunities for the staff to provide feedback about their experiences with the project during weekly staff meetings.

Ethical Concerns & IRB Compliance

Ethical concerns for this research project come from a personal standpoint. I am Hispanic and the daughter of immigrant parents. I, also, have a strong passion for the work that is being done by the nonprofit organization. Despite my personal background and interest being shared among the staff at La Casita Center, the research project and its implications remained a central focus during my time at the organization. I have experience and can relate to the participants, but my story will still vary widely to theirs and I can't assume a full knowledge. If I did, I might have misinterpreted observations or misinterpreted a response to an interview. Throughout the data, there will be areas where I make connections to some of the findings and I may have included myself with the Hispanic immigrant community, but I do not intend to make generalizations for the community based on my experience. Another ethical concern is the positionality that comes with being a researcher. Research practices are often decided without the participant's individual histories or experiences being thought of. It is again the topic of the researcher's own privileges and positionality that needs to be considered in order to engage with and respect marginalized participants. Also as a researcher, there are politics that pose a challenge when recognizing that research itself falls guilty of unjust practices, especially that of power structures and privileges.

Considering CBPARs approach of working closely with and for communities, participatory ethics is seen as an important intervention that will be used. It is the pursuit of change that goes beyond just realizing how history and society play into the current

state of injustices, but “a responsibility for critical reflection and action” (Cahill et al., p. 306) that allow for true awareness and acknowledgment at every step of the process. The goal of participatory ethics is also “doing research informed by an ‘ethic of care’” (Cahill et al., p. 306) in order to work for social and political change. At an attempt to “try to anticipate, understand, and respond together to the inevitable ethical quandaries, difficult decisions, and interpersonal struggles” (Elwood, p. 330), this responsibility to reflect is important in that, although it is my own passion that is being poured into the community of focus, it is also a wider conversation that needs to be recognized. “Researchers are faced with multiple dilemmas in engaging with marginalized populations” (Cahill et al., p. 309) and implementing participatory ethics in order to care for input is very important to the process. During my time at La Casita Center, I created working and trusting relationships with the participants to allow for free-flowing feedback and collective reflection on the project and on myself.

Traditional IRB protocols have a component of confidentiality that takes the “moral right to be recognized as sources of information as well as to accrue any benefits for their communities” (Cahill et al., p. 301) out of the research process for participants. Blake (2007) expands on this in saying that by doing so, “participants are effectively written out of research” (p. 415), reaffirming that traditional research has been done on participants rather than with. Also, since IRB approval must be sought beforehand, this “assumes that ethical problems and risks can be identified before they occur, can be identified outside the context of the research situation, and that rules for ethical practices can be universal” (Elwood, p. 331) and thus leaving out the interactions and contextual input of the participants themselves. Despite these obstacles that the IRB proposes, my

IRB application has been approved by WKU's IRB and I maintained IRB compliance. I followed guidelines on interviews by using a consent form at the start of every interview. I also used research participant confidentiality.

Broader Research Implications

This research has two important implications that go beyond the local community it will be conducted with. The first is nonprofit work. Immigrants are often left feeling as though they have nowhere to turn to during their time of need. They are pushed out and rejected from much of society and from being considered deserving citizens. Nonprofits have been on the frontlines providing for the varying needs of immigrants. They play a crucial role in the well-being of these humans, as well as in the creating a space where immigrants can finally feel welcome. Nonprofits, and their allies, are pushing societal boundaries and physical boundaries in calling the government to action. This research project provides important findings as to how nonprofit work supports the lives of marginalized populations.

The second important implication this research project has is to support the call for immigration reform. There has not been any reform implemented since 1996 and efforts to do so have been minimal and unsuccessful. Despite the great work that nonprofits are doing, the responsibility ultimately is on our government to recognize the failure that has come with using a broken immigration system. The government and its use of anti-immigrant rhetoric must recognize the way they are impacting the work of nonprofits. My research project contributes to understanding as to how the government's inaction has impacted nonprofits.

Timeline for Data Collection

My internship at La Casita Center began on May 20, 2019 and ended on August 9, 2019. Collection of data using participant observation began shortly after May 20th during the organization's day-to-day operations and public events. Collection of data using interviews occurred after the midway point of the internship to allow for relationships to be built with participants and encourage a comfortable environment for honest and genuine responses. This also allowed me to get to know the organization as a whole better and create background knowledge for interviews, as well as later data analysis. At the end of each day where data was collected, I wrote up my fieldnotes, as well as began interpreting and analyzing it. At the end of the internship, I returned to each analysis made and made further interpretations when necessary. During the Fall semester of 2019 through the Spring semester of 2020, I wrote up my findings.

Distributing Findings from the Research

I am distributing the findings from the research to the Mahurin Honors college, as well as to the nonprofit organization of focus, La Casita Center. I will present the final product in two manners: as a scholarly thesis and as a community report. The scholarly thesis will be used in order to detail the research project and distribute the findings during my Honors CE/T thesis defense. This will present my research in a scholarly manner, fitting for the individuals who I will be defending it to. On the contrary, I will make a community report to distribute the findings of the project to La Casita Center. Recognizing that the findings are representative of an organization that is supporting a marginalized community, it is important to present the findings in an understandable manner in the event that it prompts action to be taken. The community report will take into consideration the varying degree of institutional experience from the staff at La

Casita Center and ensure that it is the appropriate language and presentation suited for the audience.

Conclusion

Immigrants have faced a number of challenges that nonprofits attempt to alleviate. My research project builds on an internship with the nonprofit organization, La Casita Center. The participants of the research are the staff at this nonprofit organization. I collected data through interviews and participant observations and examined the work being done to support immigrants and how our political climate impacted that work and the advocacy being done. I used the methodology of Community-Based Participatory Action Research to conduct research with the staff that is part of or impacted by a marginalized community. The research is, first and foremost, intended to benefit the participant community and have broader implications for our society.

SECTION TWO

How do staff at La Casita Center determine which programs and resources best support the needs of Hispanic immigrants in Louisville, KY?

I begin this chapter by stating a transition from the use of the term “clients” to “accompaniments.” From the first day of my internship, I was told over and over about building relationships with accompaniments or supporting accompaniments or talking to accompaniments. The use of the term in place of clients led me to believe that it was in an effort to provide a welcoming environment for all. Accompaniments appears to be less formal and professional than the use of clients and La Casita is rather far from being a business that sees clients. After interviews and observations, as well as the internship experience as a whole, I learned that accompaniments wasn’t just a term they used to refer to the people they supported, but rather it was their philosophy. It means that La Casita is there for everyone, in every walk of life—neither in front nor behind them but rather walking alongside them for whatever decisions they make and support they may need. Therefore, in support of this perspective, I too will begin using accompaniments when referring to who I had previously called clients.

Answering the Call

The first research question lead to five interview questions that I asked the staff members at La Casita Center. The first interview question pertaining to research question #1 was, “what programs and resources support the needs of the Hispanic immigrant community?” Overall, the staff at La Casita Center identified their organization as a

prime example of what it takes to support many members of the Hispanic¹ immigrant community, particularly mentioning case management as a prime source of support for their accompaniments. Outside of the organization, staff members recognized that there is a number of resources that partner with the work that La Casita Center is doing in a number of ways to support Hispanic immigrants. The interview question appears to be very broad and vague, which was precisely why it was written in such a manner. There is no doubt that there are a number of programs and resources the immigrant community needs, but I felt it important to ask the question to the very people that provide those programs and resources. The open-endedness of the question allowed for the staff members to take the question where they would like, whether looking at their own organization or outside organizations or needs that are still not being met. All nine of the staff members that were interviewed mentioned the programs and resources that La Casita Center provides as meeting the needs of Hispanic immigrants. Furthermore, many of those staff members identified that they met the needs of the community because the community first identified the programs and resources as a need—they simply responded to that call.

As many people as La Casita Center serves, the Hispanic population is the community of focus, thus prompting that specification in the interview question, as well. One interviewee addressed the focus on this population and said, “I think La Casita is probably the most comprehensive place that provides support to specifically Latinx

¹ Later in this chapter, an interviewee addresses the use of the term “Hispanic” versus using the term “Latinx.” Despite using Latinx when referencing findings from La Casita Center, I continue to use Hispanic throughout most of this work. Hispanic is a term that I identify myself with and is something I grew up using and hearing. I respect and admire the transition to using Latinx from staff members at La Casita Center, but in an attempt to address positionality and situate myself within the research as a member of the focus community, I will continue to use the term I am accustomed to.

immigrants.”² As aforementioned, the Hispanic population makes up a large number of the minority population in America. Although not all Hispanics are undocumented, the assumption is quite the opposite, and from that assumption stems a lot of stereotypes and hate towards our community. As much legal resources as are needed for Hispanic immigrants, there is also a huge need for a place that provides safety and protection through information and education. It is still possible that La Casita Center may not be the exact place that an accompaniment needs to go to for resources, but staff is ready to provide or seek information about where to find what they need—as one staff member said, “it’s almost like being the missing link; the link between our community and the rest.”³ Whether they be immigrants or not, La Casita Center is available and willing to help much of the Hispanic population through every walk of life. I find it particularly important to note that most of the staff members at La Casita Center themselves come from Hispanic backgrounds, making the work even more personal to each individual and each individual is equipped with cultural competency. The organization provides comprehensive programs and resources for the Latinx immigrant community because many of the staff members can also identify with their accompaniments. They get to know the accompaniments and their needs through case management, something that staff members noted many other organizations do not provide. Case management at La Casita Center ranges widely from helping pay bills and enrolling children in school to setting up appointments with lawyers and calling detention centers to look for someone’s daughter or son. The workload for case managers is far and wide, but it’s one of the most important resources provided to Hispanic immigrants. Whether it be for newly arrived

² Anonymous Interviewee 2. Personal Interview. 1 August 2019.

³ Anonymous Interviewee 6. Personal interview. 22 July 2019.

immigrants navigating their new home to crisis management in difficult situations, La Casita Center is prepared to be of support.

Even though the staff members interviewed identified La Casita Center as a focus organization that provides necessary programs and resources to many in the Hispanic immigrant community, they also identified a few outside organizations in Louisville that provide other resources, as well. Particularly, staff members identified the material support they receive from outside organizations, especially from churches and activist groups in the community, that makes a major impact on what La Casita Center is able to do for their accompaniments. Most of the material support comes in the form of financial support for accompaniments that are in emergency situations, that need help making ends meet, or even for the upkeep of La Casita Center—some financial support has even provided salaries for the staff members themselves. Staff members also identified education as a huge resource that outside organizations are providing for the immigrant community, particularly ESL classes. Various libraries in Louisville, KY, offer ESL classes for the immigrant and refugee community. Despite not having an official language, the United States quite obviously favors individuals that speak English through the number of opportunities that are available to those individuals. When referring back to the idea of who deserves to become citizen and that immigrants are often made to be seen as undeserving, knowing the English language plays a huge role, as is evidenced in the US citizenship test itself that requires individuals to be proficient in English in order to pass. If an individual is unable to speak English, yet again, the stereotypes of an illegal alien are put on them and the possibility of violent threats are then present. Therefore, ESL classes are crucial to many in the Hispanic immigrant community, and the

immigrant community in general. For younger accompaniments, one staff member identified the local community college that has an office with an advisor and staff specifically for international students. That staff member also stated that many Latinx and immigrant people are currently enrolled there, and the office works to help provide resources that these individuals need to succeed. As aforementioned, immigrant parents often do not have the educational background or opportunities to support their children in any part of their education. It is particularly vital that a community college be readily available to support immigrant children because it may be the only resources they have to turn to, especially at such a high level of education. Lastly, organizations often provide low cost resources that can play a crucial part in the ability for Hispanic immigrants to have even basic necessities or the resources to succeed in their new communities. Hispanic immigrants enter a completely new and unfamiliar environment, often times with just the few things they are able to bring and nothing else. Despite working and doing so willingly, they often end up in jobs that leave them lacking the means to thrive, or even survive, in their new environments. For this reason, many immigrants may turn to organizations for help in providing the resources they need to be successful.

Devotions

The next interview question that falls under research question #1 was, “is there a specific program that you devote most of your resources to? If so, what is it and why?” At La Casita Center, programs and resources are provided according to the needs that accompaniments have identified. Therefore, in order to best serve their community, staff members may choose to head certain programs that closely relate to some of their experiences or interests. Staff members described programs including special needs

programs, mental health services, childcare, outreach, education, and legal services. For one community liaison, they focus on a special needs program called UMA: Una Mano Amiga (a friendly hand). The program accompanies parents of special needs children as they navigate life with their child. This staff member identified the program as a personal passion for them, not simply because it's a part of their life as a person with a physical disability, but they want to encourage parents to believe in and push their children, just as the staff member experienced in their life. The staff member stated, "I don't believe in disabilities, it's just a different ability,"⁴ to summarize their reason for running such a program. This same staff member also identified their devotion to the indigenous community as their *first* passion because they, too, are a part of that community. They would like to empower their indigenous accompaniments after seeing the impact over 500 years of colonization has had on them. Many indigenous community members have trouble looking up or raising their voice to simply be heard. The indigenous community has been forced into a mindset that they are nothing, that they can and should be owned, and that they shouldn't be seen. The staff member identifies their position in that community and the pride they feel from it, which can often be so far from the position that some of their accompaniments are in. Therefore, the staff member sees a desperate need to empower their community.

Mental health services is also a program that Hispanic immigrants and La Casita Center staff members identified as a need. The staff member that runs the program stated that their job is to have conversations with people and help them as they navigate very stressful situations like the one they are going through now, referring to the current

⁴ Anonymous Interviewee 6. Personal interview. 22 July 2019.

political climate and policies. There is recognition that people in other communities may also be going through situations that affect their mental health, and the organization's intent is to attend to as many people as possible, but for many in the Hispanic community, mental health services are particularly important because "we don't believe in mental health, really."⁵ There is often pressure on Hispanic immigrants to push themselves to the limit of achieving the American Dream, whether it exists for us or not, and the stress continues to build. Not only does the community feel like they have to measure up to being the deserving citizen, but there is a cultural stigmatization of mental health—it does not exist or it does not matter. They do not have time for self-care, they are not recognizing the symptoms of problems, or they have to physically work through the problem and ignore it. Mental health issues are affecting adults and children alike. Therefore, the staff member I interviewed and others at La Casita Center are having open conversations about mental health with their accompaniments throughout their other programs such as summer camp, as well as providing them the opportunity to talk with someone about it one on one. Educating members of the Hispanic immigrant community about mental health is done in an effort to target current issues that people are facing, as well as begin to dismantle the stigmatization about it in our community.

Seeing as many of the people that walk through the door of La Casita Center are families, the organization saw the need to have a childcare program in place. Not only does La Casita Center provide a corner filled with toys for children to play in while their parents/guardians are being accompanied, every Tuesday, there is a preschool program offered called "La Escuelita" (the little school). Again, families with little ones may not

⁵ Anonymous Interviewee 7. Personal interview. 25 July 2019.

have the necessary tools to be a part of a formal learning setting. Families that take their preschool-aged kids to La Escuelita can trust that they are being treated and taught with the cultural sensitivity that is necessary for their children. The childcare program staff member stated that it felt as though they had fallen into the position—they had preschool-aged children of their own when they started volunteering, making it an easy fit for them when it became a full-time position. For older children, during the summer months, La Casita Center provides a summer camp. The summer camp, as well as the childcare program in general, is much more than just a free place that parents can drop their kids off during the summer. One interviewee stated, “the most important intention is to try to give the kids the advantage of knowing that through education, change is made” and that “education is at every level, from the home, from saying ‘please and thank you,’ to appreciating nature, appreciating the effort of volunteers, appreciating being [at summer camp].”⁶ Therefore, the summer camp requires a lot of attention and resources, so counselors are hired, volunteers are rushed in, and staff members such as the volunteer coordinator even reallocate their time and effort to this program. As part of La Casita Center’s egalitarian approach, no one program or staff member is over another, allowing for staff members to pretty easily ask for help and find the support necessary from one another. La Casita Center also creates each program with the intention of it being sustainable for their community, and something that the community can go to long-term, which is yet another reason why staff members have no problem devoting themselves to other programs, possibly on top of the tasks they already have.

⁶ Anonymous Interviewee 9. Personal interview. 25 July 2019.

The social media coordinator for La Casita Center used to be a community liaison, but after seeing a need for solidarity work, they transitioned into their new position. This staff member identifies the program that they devote themselves to as communications strategy. They focus their work on figuring out what ways the organization can help in different areas, as well as empowering the members of the Hispanic immigrant community to help themselves. There is a huge educational component to this position. A lot of the social media coordinator's time may be spent on making flyers, social media posts, or videos, that capture the information and resources needed by community members. Not only that, but the information provided must be presented in a form that is understandable and culturally sensitive. The community must understand what resources they have available to them and know where they can turn to. This means that information is presented at below an eight-grade level. It is detailed, color coordinated, and palatable for the entire community to understand.

On the other hand, the executive director described a need that was uncovered from outside of La Casita Center's walls. La Casita Center recognizes that they cannot attend to every member in their community and not every Hispanic immigrant will go to their organization, therefore, they must go out into the community to educate. There has been an increase in demand for La Casita Center to have meetings, presentations, and programs from schools, hospitals, health centers, community centers, and agencies. Other organizations are encountering some people from the Hispanic immigrant community with similar issues and they may not have the capacity to serve in the adequate culturally appropriate manner that is necessary. Not only does La Casita Center accompany the people they see walk through their doors, but they are also accompanying many other

organizations in the Louisville area, and beyond. Doing this sort of outreach has also allowed for the executive director to find opportunities for funding for the staff and necessities of La Casita Center. These opportunities are incredibly important and play into the success of La Casita Center's grant writer. For this staff member, fundraising is where most of their time and effort is dedicated. The grant writer is an extremely important part in ensuring the work La Casita Center does has the resources to be successful. Without the necessary funding, the organization would not be able to respond at the level which they have been responding and at which their community needs them. There is a goal of not needing to turn people away because of lack of resources to treat everyone equally and, undoubtedly, money plays a crucial role in that.

Lastly, one community liaison identified legal services as being the program they devoted most of their resources to, despite not actually being a full-time member of the legal team. The demand for these services is increasingly growing and was evident in just the short months I spent at the organization. La Casita Center offers free legal consultations with a retired immigrant lawyer and a retired family lawyer on Wednesdays. On top of that, staff members are present to help answer any day-to-day questions about immigration and asylum cases, even going as far as filling out asylum applications for accompaniments and writing letters of de-escalation. The staff member I interviewed began to receive phone calls from accompaniments needing help finding where their family was because they were somewhere in a detention center. Yet again, as part of their egalitarian approach, time and effort are allocated to where they are necessary and this staff member spent much of their case management meetings working in some sort of legal capacity. Despite being a social worker, the community liaison finds

themselves working outside of that range often to help out in giving unofficial legal advice. There is so much information that is being missed by immigrants, yet so much is being decided about them in our current political climate. From that missed information and possible misunderstandings comes a lot of questions and fear that many from the Hispanic immigrant community must deal with. The system as a whole is challenging, but even more so when English is not your first language, and maybe you do not feel comfortable using a computer like many of the accompaniments. Legal services at La Casita Center was undoubtedly one of the biggest programs they are running that meets a wide range of demands and sees a drastic number of people coming in seeking help.

The Fundamental Nature of their Work

The third interview question that addressed the first research question asked, “What is La Casita Center’s philosophy on how to support the Hispanic immigrant community?” and I organized the responses into four general categories: accompaniment, empowerment, solidarity and hospitality, and language usage. At the beginning of this chapter I explained the shift from using clients to now using accompaniments. The belief is that the staff is there to accompany the person, walk through life with them no matter what decisions they make. In that sense, the staff is making their accompaniments feel welcome, at home, like they belong without judgement or reservations. The staff is there to serve to whatever need someone may have, but they do not force anything onto another person simply because they believe it is what is best for them. Accompaniment for La Casita Center is in the sense that the organization listens to and understands the problems that their community is facing, they know what the needs are, and maybe they cannot give accompaniments what they need, but they can guide them towards the right channels

that would better their accompaniment's current situation. One observation in particular spoke to the depth of how welcoming La Casita Center truly is. The security team at La Casita Center works on ensuring that the staff are taking necessary steps to be prepared for any emergency situations, as well as how to make sure information stays confidential. They work to ensure the safety of the accompaniments as well as the staff. On many occasions, one problematic accompaniment would be brought to their attention. Despite the number of issues, it was always handled by having genuine and sincere conversations with them. During our staff meetings, the safety team brought up this accompaniment to say that the organization finds it important to avoid banning or escalating problems. They also mentioned evident mental health problems that the accompaniment was going through. No matter who the individual is or what they are going through, La Casita Center's value of welcoming, listening, and walking with others extends to even the most troubling situations. One staff member I interviewed summed up the philosophy of accompaniment by saying "If we don't know, [...] even if there isn't anyone that can resolve our problems, the simple act of knowing you're not alone, the simple act of knowing you're accompanied, in one form or another, makes the message more sincere."⁷ This focus on making sure people are not alone is part of what many other staff members identified as a desire to build community and create a space that allows for genuine connections that make a community strong. At a volunteer and intern orientation, staff reminded the attendees that they must be very conscious of the culture and communities that enter the doors. This may look like asking people if they want food repeatedly because it may be undignified to take handouts for some people. At the same time, they

⁷ Anonymous Interviewee 9. Personal interview. 25 July 2019.

must also incorporate the Hispanic culture aspect of offering food and being welcoming into the home. Through the lens of accompaniment, services being provided by La Casita Center feel less like a handout and create a comfortable environment that invites people in. Community building is an integral part of the accompaniment process because it creates a sense that everyone, accompaniments and staff, are all working together for collective liberation. Most people that walk through the doors have shared experiences and can find comfort in each other to walk through life together. Through my observations, it was obvious that many accompaniments eventually created a sense of belonging that meant they weren't just there to collect services they needed, but they went there to visit their friends or other community members. Every day, staff saw community members that they recognized and knew well enough to ask personal questions about their families, their situations, their lives. Staff members would sit down with their accompaniments during lunchtime, not to ask them about their cases or the services they needed, but rather to just have a casual conversation and enjoy a meal together. On one such occasion that I observed, a group of friends brought in cake and food to celebrate another accompaniments birthday, without any prompting from the organization itself. For the Latinx culture, having a sense of community is part of who they are. They are a collectivist culture and family models can often include extended family members and even those that are not biologically related (Carteret 2011). Therefore, after seeking advice from staff members, accompaniments feel a sense of trust in that the staff member is really looking out for their best interests and can make a decision regarding their situation.

La Casita Center is available to provide information and services to many in the Hispanic immigrant community, but more importantly they are working towards empowering their accompaniments in the face of their difficult situations. This concept of empowering others also meant that staff needed to feel empowered themselves. I recall that on my first day, instead of telling me to feel free to do something (e.g. ask questions, ask for help, etc.), I was told to feel empowered to do so. I saw this as the process of instilling the organizations philosophy in me, as well as giving me an understanding of how much value empowerment has for the staff. With this language, the organization is constantly reminding themselves and others about the foundation of the work they are doing. As well as for me as a new intern, telling me to feel empowered to do something felt a bit more personal. In Latinx culture, there may be a hesitation to ask for help from others and using such specific and intentional language was way that I was reminded that asking for help is okay and not a shameful act. From my first day forward, it was quite obvious that the intentionality of empowering staff members and having empowered staff members translated into the work they were doing. Many staff members provide case management to their accompaniments, where they learn about their situations and suggest possible options. A key part of case management at La Casita Center is that the staff member is not telling their accompaniments what decision to make or where to go or what to do, but rather they lay out what can be done—the rest is up to the individual themselves. The accompaniment must be able to seek out healthy, safe, and/or sustainable solutions despite a culture that tells them they are incapable of doing so or even keeps them from making the best decisions for themselves. Empowering members of the Hispanic immigrant community means that the organization is trying to provide the

tools necessary for community members to navigate a new culture, a new home, or a new situation. This process of empowerment requires a lot of patience and educating on the part of the organization, as well as relying on the willingness of their accompaniments. At the same time that La Casita Center hopes to empower their accompaniments within their building, they also hope that education and resources are being shared from their accompaniments, and from social media, to individuals outside of their walls. In particular, a staff member stated that this process of empowering an entire community is often centered on the women they talk to. “Women always are hubs and afford networks of other people so they’re connecting whoever else is in their family to those resources as well.”⁸ There are many members in the community that are facing challenging situations and La Casita Center recognizes that they may not have the capacity to reach everyone. Therefore, by creating networks of people with information and resources, La Casita Center is attempting to empower the entire community.

Solidarity and hospitality are in the very fabric of what La Casita Center is and does. “In our culture, Latinx, our job reflects who we are,” one staff member states, “our philosophy is to be in solidarity—solidarity is not a job, it is our mission.”⁹ For La Casita Center, solidarity does not have to be a grand show and every act of solidarity they participate in does not need to be documented. Although La Casita Center puts on many community events, such as a Summer Brunch and MLKJ day, and puts out a lot of their personal stances on current issues on their social media platforms, the organization proudly shows and tells of their solidarity with the Hispanic immigrant community in more ways than what is being seen. La Casita Center also shows solidarity in the little

⁸ Anonymous Interviewee 3. Personal interview. 23 July 2019.

⁹ Anonymous Interviewee 1. Personal interview. 1 August 2019.

things that mean a lot to their community, such as with their food pantry, their diaper bank, their daily provided lunch, and food closet. The programs that are in place at La Casita Center are aiming towards a holistic approach that provides support for whatever their community is going through. In listening to the needs of their community and providing the necessary tools to be successful, La Casita Center and its staff are showing the Hispanic immigrant community, as well as those outside of this community, that they are in agreement and support of who they are. For La Casita Center, solidarity is not something that is difficult for them to act on. To the organization, they are simply acting on a belief that everyone deserves basic humanity and help and support, without fear of judgement. Through actions of solidarity, La Casita Center is also showing hospitality. Accompaniments are at the forefront of every decision that the staff make. Again, the actions of the staff at La Casita Center are not done with the thought of getting something in return or getting attention from the outside community, but their intentions are completely done in order to treat and serve their accompaniments the best they can. This means that hospitality is not done only in a general manner for the Hispanic immigrant community, but that La Casita Center incorporates “the ingredients of feminism, de-colonization, dismantling the patriarchy, and intentional spaces for LGBTQ community members, for the special needs community, physical or emotional.”¹⁰ Hospitality for La Casita Center means receiving *every* individual and responding to *every* need as best they can.

Lastly, La Casita Center’s philosophy is explicitly seen through the language they use. As mentioned, La Casita Center incorporates ideas of de-colonization into their work

¹⁰ Anonymous Interviewee 1. Personal interview. 1 August 2019.

and a part of that means being very specific about the words they use—Latinx instead of Hispanic. An op-ed by David Gonzales in *The New York Times* states that the term Hispanic “recalls the colonization by Spain and Portugal and ignores the Indian and African roots of many people it describes.” The word itself can be offensive to many in the community and can be traced to a forced assimilation by many to this country. Hispanic is too often used as a blanket term for a vastly diverse community of people from different countries with different languages, different traditions, and different roots, in order to appease the American system and blatantly ignore people’s realities. Colonization can be a very traumatic, emotional thought for some people in the immigrant community and staff members are intentional to avoid traumatizing or retraumatizing their accompaniments, even if it means a constant check on the vocab they use. Latinx, on the other hand, affirms a number of identities, from country, culture, and society, to gender preferences. It includes indigenous communities and the LGBTQ community and affirms everyone’s personal identity. Conversations are intentional with each accompaniment as to be inclusive of all. For La Casita Center, every part of their work is intentional and culturally sensitive as to provide more than just the necessary physical services that an accompaniment may need, but also providing the necessary respect and care for every aspect of who they are.

Feminism

In addition to asking about the philosophies of La Casita Center, I specifically asked , “In what way do feminist goals and activism feature in La Casita Center’s programming?” Over my course of time at La Casita Center, it became very evident that La Casita Center is full of feminist thought. The staff believes that the work being done is

radical in the sense that it is practical for their accompaniments in meeting their needs, while also being one of the few, if any other, organizations that do what they do.

Therefore, for La Casita Center, feminist goals and activism are an essential part of the work they do and this reveals itself in a number of ways. As a front desk worker, I was able to be one of the first people accompaniments would approach if they had questions. I recall being asked a question and not knowing the answer, therefore, I asked another staff member, but I used the term “illegal” to describe an individual, as that is how the accompaniment presented the question to me. Before answering the question, I was first corrected to say “undocumented.” Although feeling slightly embarrassed, I knew that such a term is so deep within many Hispanic immigrants that we ignore the implications it has—devaluing us as humans allows society to do what they please with us. Nonprofits like La Casita Center that have feminist ideologies take on the responsibility of not only serving many Hispanic immigrants, but also beginning to dismantle what our country has stereotyped and called immigrants. The feminist ideologies that La Casita Center believes in are rooted in dismantling the oppressive systems and institutions that are harming human lives, and justifying that harm through scare tactics, stereotypes, slander, etc. Terms such as “illegal” and “alien” can often go unnoticed by our community that even we use it to describe ourselves. Fostering a feminist philosophy that everyone is equal can begin to shift mindsets and change the language being used, as well as frame the issues that immigrants are facing to be seen as unjust treatment of *humans*. La Casita Center recognizes that they may not be able to break the powerful and oppressive systems that are outside, but they can choose to break them within their walls.

When it comes to spreading valuable information and creating social change, the process can often start with education. In that same sense, La Casita Center believes that they must begin implementing feminist goals of equality with the children they serve. The Child Enrichment Program is where La Casita Center begins, even with small steps, ensuring that children grow up knowing that everyone is equal and capable. In particular, the programming for children is teaching them that girls deserve the same opportunities that boys do, and they should be treated accordingly. On top of teaching children how to fairly treat each other, through their programming, La Casita Center works towards giving children the tools to be activists and create positive change. The staff is hoping to get the children to think about their actions in terms of the future—the future of their education, the future of nature, the future of their community, the future of their city. When children begin to realize that their actions affect more than just themselves, they can begin to act in favor of a better society for everyone. La Casita Center may not directly say that they are raising activists or feminists, but rather they are promoting a mindset of care and compassion for those around them.

La Casita Center also demonstrates feminist activism in their organizational structure. Not only is it extremely important that every staff member work together as a team, but they are intentional about working together as equals. As much and as frequently as possible, La Casita Center is addressing power dynamics in their relationships with each other as staff and with accompaniments. Obviously, each staff member has their own job title and responsibilities to fulfill, but the organization uses an egalitarian approach that all staff members are equal to one another, from the executive director to the summer camp counselors. From the first day, I observed that the staff

members even avoided saying someone is in charge of a program, event, organization, etc. Rather, the staff members say that a certain staff member is able to accompany or support you in something. The organization was intentional in the language itself about cultivating equality among individuals, no matter what a title traditionally has said about them. One interviewee stated that feminism among staff members means “always keeping that open line of communication with everyone. That’s not ‘I’m above you, you listen to me.’ It’s really a collaborative effort.”¹¹ Furthermore, recognizing that everyone is equal means that the staff recognize that they are also equal to their accompaniments. Despite the staff providing support and services to their accompaniments, they continually push a mindset that they are walking alongside their accompaniments, often times in shared experiences. These shared experiences result in knowledge that can be contributed from both the staff member as well as an accompaniment. All have something to contribute and all should be treated as such, which is the way that La Casita Center carries itself as an organization.

When it comes to treating everyone as equals, La Casita Center takes pride in being a women-led organization. From the ground up, the organization has been built by strong women who let nothing, or no one hold them back. This same mindset pushes on and is evidenced in the staff members themselves who are able to work with kids in tow. Despite the many responsibilities that come with being a mother, La Casita Center recognizes that women are capable of being more than caretakers and moms, if they choose to do so. La Casita Center cultivates the many talents of individuals and provides them with opportunities, despite the obstacles or roles that society puts on them.

¹¹ Anonymous Interviewee 5. Personal interview. 18 July 2019.

Therefore, the organization makes an effort to support working mothers in allowing them to bring their kids to the center and participate in the Child Enrichment Program. This support is based on much more than what the organization believes is right, but it is based on love—love for their communities that are in similar situations, from mothers, to immigrants, to Latinx, to all the possible intersectional identities that the staff and their accompaniments share. Intersectionality plays a huge role in the way that La Casita Center accompanies members of the Hispanic immigrant community. Intersectionality “recognizes that individual aspects of our identity are not held in isolation from one another but interact with one another” and intersectional feminism recognizes that “women’s lives are constructed by multiple, intersecting systems of oppression” (Sawyer & Shenvi 2019). La Casita Center wastes no effort on excluding anyone from any aspect of their organization based on identity, including employment, but they do feel responsible to understand the strong connections between their accompaniments’, as well as their own, aspects of identity. One of many ways that La Casita Center incorporated intersectional feminism was during their weekly staff meetings. The organization’s agreements/values are read at the beginning of each meeting. The agreements are in Spanish and the gender of the words were intentional to be written as female. The agreements also begin by stating that the intentions of the organization, from the day it started until now, are to serve Hispanic immigrant women. The agreements reference their belief in treating each person with the same values, no matter their identities, while also recognizing that their accompaniments’ identities will present issues of oppressive systems and how those need to be addressed. For example, one agreement states that the staff members will not assume, they will ask. For women, especially Hispanic immigrant

women, our patriarchal society is set up to leave their voices out and to make decisions on their behalf. Therefore, La Casita Center is intentional to listen and make women's voices heard. In that agreement alone, different identities are addressed (women, Hispanic, immigrant) as well as the impacts of an oppressive system (patriarchy).

In order to cultivate this love for their community, La Casita Center structures the organization to be community-oriented, not process-oriented. When accompaniments come in the door, it is not about getting them out as soon as possible. Rather, staff at La Casita Center rely on one another to get the accompaniment where they need to be to better their situation. In this way, they are continuing to build a community with their accompaniments, as well as building a tighter community with the staff in an intentional way. The community is always prioritized above efficiency and rules. In this way, they treat every individual with the dignity and care that they deserve, as well as treating them as equals that may not know the answers but are working together and walking together to figure it out. Since there is no one right way to serve every member in the community, La Casita Center is always transforming and is always open to change. They must make sure to constantly keep up with the changing needs, and the changing politics, in order to best serve and treat people the way they should be treated. Yet again, La Casita Center recognizes that a part of their feminist goals to treat everyone equally is to also be culturally competent. When staff members compare their organization to other nonprofits, they identify issues of lack of sensitivity for the trauma that their accompaniments have, their lack of understanding the literacy skills that their accompaniments come with, or their accompaniment's inability to speak English. Other nonprofits are not prepared to face these obstacles and may not care to change that. They

continue to push discriminatory thoughts and actions on already discriminated against communities. So, if it's with the language they use, as mentioned before, or in the way they truly understand and listen to the community, La Casita Center is using feminist activism to lift many in the Hispanic immigrant community. They are present to encourage and provide the tools for the decision-making process, but the power is ultimately left in the hands of the accompaniments, something that is far too often not the case in our society.

Gaps

Although La Casita Center hosts a number of events, programs, and services that respond to the needs of many in the Hispanic immigrant community, more so than many other nonprofit organizations or governmental agencies, the staff recognizes that there is still more to be done. The final interview question asked pertaining to the first research question was, "Are there any gaps in services or programs? If so, what are they and what types of programs or resources would you want to implement to fill this gap?" This interview question most directly answers the main research question of how the staff determines programming and services to meet the needs of the people in the Hispanic immigrant community that La Casita Center serves. The answer lies in that the gaps that have yet to be filled are what many in the Hispanic immigrant community needs, and those needs determine La Casita Center's programs and services. So, in a better sense, it is not the staff at La Casita Center who are picking and choosing what work they will do, but rather it is the focus community.

First and foremost, all the programs and services that are currently in place at La Casita Center are already filling a gap that was identified by Hispanic immigrant

community members. Although they are technically filled gaps, the staff recognized that those programs and resources need to be strengthened or expanded. In terms of strengthening the programs, often times it comes down to time and effort. There is not enough time to give every program and service the devotion that it needs, as every single one of them is constantly in demand by the hundreds of accompaniments that come in daily at La Casita Center. La Casita Center opens its doors to the public from 10-3, Monday through Thursday, and the staff stays for an extra 2-3 hours catching up on work after hours, or they come in on closed days. The need for strengthening programs also comes down to the lack of people-power that La Casita Center has. The staff there are some of the most hardworking and dedicated community members and activists that I have seen at a nonprofit organization. They are truly devoted to their work and to their accompaniments, but even still, their collective efforts may not be enough. Over the few months that I interned at La Casita Center, the number of staff grew from 12 to 20. Increase in people-power is evident but as one staff member stated, “La Casita Center needs more people, and with the passing of time, we have seen the number of people that participate as staff has increased, the building has grown, but as the population that needs help increases, the demand for services increases.”¹² During staff meetings, I observed that more and more language about being tired, stressed, having to get mentally prepared for the day, was being brought up. The summer was recognized as one of the most hectic times of the year, but even with the increased number of team members being present, the increased demand for the organization was quite obviously taking a toll. On several occasions, acupuncturists were invited to our staff meetings in an attempt to provide

¹² Anonymous Interviewee 9. Personal interview. 25 July 2019.

some relief on the tension that was building up in staff members. For a number of reasons, staff at La Casita Center recognized that they need more hands on deck to provide the necessary support to their accompaniments, especially staff that can specialize in one program or one service. Often times, staff members have to be reallocated as demands grow and change, so to have staff that are centered in one area would allow the present staff to do the same. Whether it be more staff, volunteers, or interns that are used to fill this gap, the urgency of the job comes second to the need for people that are culturally competent, and hopefully have the necessary language abilities. Being culturally competent at La Casita Center also means being trauma informed. Many immigrants carry trauma from their home countries, from the journey to the US, from being in the US, and possibly from any other aspect of their personal lives, and La Casita Center needs to be ready to address it. Among the staff, one interviewee said, “I would like to have more training or discussion because as I’m seeing more [group of people] with trauma coming in, that’s not something I, in particular, have a specialty in knowing how to deal with [...]. I’m learning on the fly as I go.”¹³ Staff at La Casita Center are always learning on how to better serve and are able rely on one another to help when it comes to facing accompaniments with trauma, but the circumstances are constantly changing and trauma is a sensitive topic that needs addressing. Even if the accompaniments do not share their trauma openly, or even acknowledge it, it is important that staff be sensitive to understanding where trauma comes from for these communities, allowing them to best support and empower the community. When it comes to volunteers as people-power, many come in without the necessary language abilities and then get

¹³ Anonymous Interviewee 5. Personal interview. 18 July 2019.

relegated to background positions. Although volunteering is greatly appreciated, La Casita Center needs people that can be sympathetic *and* empathetic, and only so much of that can be done without the ability to listen and understand another person. They need people that can make powerful connections with accompaniments and language is a necessary skill to do so.

When I asked about specifically expanding and strengthening programs, the Child Enrichment Program was a common answer among the interviewed staff. Again, the staff mentioned having more people available to attend to the kids. An accompaniment that came in without kids was very rare therefore, one of the biggest, if not the biggest, demands is someone to care for and entertain the kids. It is not just about someone to watch over the children, but there is a need to create relationships with the children, as well. Often times, it is the same families walking through the doors of La Casita Center and creating a relationship with the children was something that was emphasized from the first day I was there. With some kids, I was given some information on their background to get a sense of who they were and how to best care for them. It was about creating a trusting and comfortable relationship with the children for them to listen and behave, as well as to genuinely care about them. At the same time, it is evident that with the amount of demand there are for other services, the possibility to create an individual and enriching relationship with each child that comes in is currently not possible. Not only is there a need for people to do this, there is a need for space to do this. The staff identified that there needs to be a specific place for Children Enrichment Programming to take place. Currently, there is a small corner in front of an office being used as a toy area, and on Tuesdays for La Escuelita, a specific room space is used, but the bathrooms and

stairs are located there, making it likely that the class will be interrupted. Another program that needs expanding is the legal clinic. Again, this is another program that the staff identified as needing more staff. Particularly, a lawyer on staff would be extremely beneficial to the organization in meeting a common need among Hispanic immigrants. For the legal clinic, retired lawyers are volunteering to give free consultation one day a week and, although greatly appreciated, it is still not enough. Community liaisons put so much of their time in making up the rest of the legal needs throughout the rest of the week, despite it not being the individual staff member's specialty. Community liaisons are willing to help: as one staff member recognized the current legal team supervisor is working on a lot of legal cases alone, staying at the center until midnight and often sleeping only three hours a night, but even with the help from multiple staff members, it's not meeting all demands. A paid and regular lawyer as a staff member at La Casita Center would be a beneficial asset in addition to the already present legal team and support. Essentially, what La Casita Center staff meant by expanding their programs and services is being able to provide more. They see the programs and services that they currently have and how they are helping meet the needs now, but to a certain extent and with limitations. On Diaper Day, donated diapers are split into smaller portions to give to the families that come for that service, and staff recognizes that it is still not enough. La Casita Center gives out a bag or two of food but recognizes that it may only last for a few days. Also, the food pantry is open almost every day that La Casita Center is open, but during my time as an intern, there were many days that no food could be given out unless it was dire circumstances because there was just not enough. The organization wants to be at a place where they do not feel limited in their giving and can provide for people at

any time with long-term effects. Of course, everything helps, but La Casita Center wants to help more—wants to feed more, clothe more, meet more, care for more.

Although not necessarily a missing program or service, La Casita Center staff identified parts of the organization as a whole that need to be changed. As demand increases, and as fear increases, more people are flooding the walls of La Casita Center. Although a two-story and relatively spacious building, it is not enough for the staff to attend to every accompaniment and to host every program and service they have, or want to have. At the time of my internship, many staff were sharing the same cubicles, with only 3 staff members actually having their own offices. With sensitive information being shared from accompaniments, this lack of space and privacy creates a huge problem in creating a welcoming and comfortable environment. When meetings were too sensitive, staff members may ask to borrow another's office, leaving that staff member displaced or unable to attend to accompaniments. Although demands are being met, it would be ideal that each staff member have their own private space to put all their attention on the accompaniment. Not only is there a need for more space, one interviewee implied that the biggest limitation La Casita Center has may be a matter of getting a new space in saying that "we're in a building that is kind of quirky, and lack of air condition or heat, and appropriate space, so I feel like our programming is pretty strong, but sometimes we're not able to do as much as we could because of space."¹⁴ Another aspect that La Casita Center wants to address is the restriction they have in hours of business. Although their demand is high and continues to increase, the staff wants to reach more and would be able to do so by being available 24 hours and through more community outreach. To have

¹⁴ Anonymous Interviewee 2. Personal Interview. 1 August 2019.

2-3 staff members available at the center at all hours, or to have a phone service available 24 hours a day, would allow for La Casita Center to see more cases and help more people in the Hispanic immigrant community. Unfortunately, the logistics of salaries, availability, and the additional fees of keeping the place running for an extended amount of time, would be too much to bear at the moment. When it comes to doing community outreach, La Casita Center would love the opportunity to be mobile, a sort of La Casita Center on wheels. La Casita Center would be able to go to neighborhoods identified as Latinx, where people of low-income, disability, etc., may be and may not have otherwise been able to go to the physical center itself. Although La Casita Center reaches a wide Hispanic immigrant community, far past those that are just in Louisville, there is plenty of opportunity to serve more community members. In that same sense, La Casita Center staff also want to bridge a gap between what people expect/hear about the organization and what is actually true, as well as just provide honest and accurate information, through their outreach. La Casita Center definitely relies on word of mouth to have such a huge population of people that they accompany, but as one interviewee recalled, “then half of the job of seeing them is explaining ‘oh, we don’t actually do what you heard.’”¹⁵ In some cases, even if the staff members were not equipped to handle some situations that accompaniments were in, they did not want to turn anyone away. Sitting at lunch one day, a staff member was telling me about their case that was being entirely handled through phone calls. The person calling was from New Orleans and was asking for a friend in Texas who needed immediate assistance with a lawyer, pro-bono. I asked how it was even possible for La Casita Center to help from Louisville. The staff member said it

¹⁵ Anonymous Interviewee 4. Personal interview. 29 July 2019.

was a lot of reaching out to organizations in Texas and seeing what they can do. Even if it is just googling and making phone calls, it can be daunting and time-consuming, but the staff member was willing. This was not the first time I heard of clients calling or coming from places outside of Louisville—including from other states. The amount of information that is disseminated about La Casita Center reaches a huge audience and it is important for staff that the information be correct, as well as for the accompaniments that give up much of their time to be there in hopes of having getting their situations resolved. Therefore, staff want to be able to do more community outreach, allowing them to be the first face that people see about La Casita.

Lastly, La Casita Center staff identified new programs that they would like to implement that would meet the growing needs of Hispanic immigrants. One of those is a grassroots education program for worker co-ops and collectives. A huge issue among Hispanic immigrants has been wage theft, labor abuse, and workplace discrimination. In Kentucky, there are no resources for community members facing these issues, besides one wage claim clinic in the whole state that is only open once a month, making it nearly impossible to use. With many immigrants coming to the US with hopes of working, it has become far too easy for people to get exploited. Therefore, La Casita Center wants to take the initiative in defending workers' rights and educate others on what is fair for their community members. They want to be able to create safe spaces where community members can turn to and trust that they are being treated with honesty and respect, and that any issues they come with are being treated in the same manner. Another program that La Casita Center would like to implement is a health program. La Casita Center partners with other organizations to offer free health clinics, but this only occurs a few

times a year and the demand is extremely high on those days. In order to meet high demands, La Casita Center wants to have a program in place that educates members in different communities, mostly women, about health concerns, making them point people in their communities to address issues. The women become resources for the neighborhood or community which in result empowers both the women themselves to take charge of the situations, as well as the community to be able to rely on people they trust to meet their need.

Overall, La Casita Center is meeting demands that are continually increasing as the needs of Hispanic immigrants increase and change. There are many ways that La Casita Center is making a huge difference in the lives of their accompaniments, and it is all thanks to the willingness to listen and address their accompaniments needs. Not only is this evident in the programs and services that La Casita Center offers, but also in the specific roles that the staff devote their time to. The staff have a wide range of passions and talents that are being put to use in ensuring that the best of themselves is being offered to their accompaniments, who deserve that much. Not only are individual talents essential to La Casita Center's ability to meet needs, they must keep philosophies of accompaniment, empowerment, and solidarity and hospitality at the forefront of all they do to be able to support many in the Hispanic immigrant community. Feminism also plays a key role throughout different aspects of La Casita Center that, although they may not be evident to many in the community, are crucial in the work being done. In order to ensure that everyone is being treated as equals in a society that will often tell them opposite, La Casita Center is constantly transforming and looking to make important

changes that continue to provide to the community that matters to them most, as many of them are community members themselves.

SECTION THREE

In what way has the current political climate and anti-immigrant rhetoric in the United States impacted, changed, altered or reinforced the work that La Casita Center is doing?

The political climate in the United States has been particularly harsh towards immigrants in recent years. Although it would not be sensible to put all the blame on our current administration, it has become quite clear to many immigrants that the current President has allowed hateful action and rhetoric to be protected and even encouraged. President Trump built a campaign on promises of expanding the border wall, mass deportations, and curbing immigration to the US as a whole. The administration has ramped up deportations, separated children from their parents, overcrowded and created more detention centers, limited the number of asylum cases accepted, and cut the number of refugees admitted to the US (Felter, Renwick, and Cheatham 2020). The action from this administration has caused mass fear among immigrants. Immigrants are not only fearful of the legal action that could happen, and is happening, but they are also fearful of the anti-immigrant rhetoric that the current administration has allowed. The President has not shied away from telling blatant lies about immigrants such as calling them criminals, rapists, drug dealers, terrorists, etc. (Arce 2019). The kind of language being used has put a target on the backs of non-white bodies. During my time at La Casita Center, one of the biggest impacts we saw from the current administration was fear of U.S. Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids. With a lot of fear came a lot of misinformation so

La Casita Center tried to be on the front lines such as checking if ICE sightings were real or not and creating flyers and workshops for know-your-rights information. La Casita Center also increased security measures by bringing in volunteers as security personnel. Even when ICE raids were not directly impacting the Hispanic immigrant community in Louisville, La Casita Center felt the pressure and emotions from other cities where these actions were happening. During my last week, there was an ICE raid that took 680 immigrants at a food processing plant in Mississippi (Gonzales 2019). We had an impromptu meeting right before our doors opened to discuss the tragedy. We discussed the implications it has on a nonprofit organization, like La Casita Center, and the responsibility to make sure people know what to do. The meeting was very emotional, especially when the conversations shifted to the number of kids who had their first day of school and returned to find their parents gone. We were encouraged to take 5 minutes, if we needed them, to cry, talk, be alone and then keep moving. The mental health staff reminded us that it is important to unpack what we feel and think so that we don't drown in it and potentially drown others with us. At the end of the day, La Casita Center gathered staff to create a video that would go on all of our social media platforms showing solidarity with the immigrant community in Mississippi. The situations that have been consequences of the current administration's actions have had a huge impact on nonprofit organizations in the way that they are able to serve their community, but many continue to do so in spite of it all, knowing the power and desperate need for their work.

Impacts, Change, Alterations, Reinforcements

For one interview question, I went ahead and decided to ask the interviewees my broader research question directly. I found it quite important to address this research

question in such a manner as to get direct responses from the organization. Many assumptions can be made about the consequences of the current administration, but only those that are on the frontlines can truly describe the reactions from their daily lives and work. The responses from interviewees are in relation to their resources, demand, and stress for the Hispanic immigrant community and the organization, which is to be expected. Unfortunately, some interviewees mentioned that violence as a direct result of the current administration, with multiple specific mentions of domestic violence, has been on the rise.

Staff members that were interviewed mentioned stress on the community and a need for more resources to serve the community as the main impacts from the current political climate. For the Hispanic immigrant community, a lot is changing and as a staff member described it, “the needs haven’t necessarily grown in that they were always there, but they have become more urgent.”¹⁶ Many Hispanic immigrants are feeling less safe with the number of drastic changes that are being made about their lives, without their success or well-being in mind. There is fear about what will happen next and many try to stay informed and prepared for any catastrophe. The growing of fear means a growing of stress and a feeling of every situation being a crisis for many Hispanic immigrants and many often respond by running to places like La Casita Center that provides them with accurate information and services. The Hispanic immigrant community is feeling more and more unsafe to where they feel that they need to seek more resources and more support. Therefore, many interviewees also mentioned that the current political climate has impacted La Casita Center in the need for more resources.

¹⁶ Anonymous Interviewee 5. Personal interview. 18 July 2019.

As one staff member said, “we’re just surviving day by day so the resources and the programs may be lacking on resources, because we need more in order to make them more efficient.”¹⁷ Most of the days during my internship, accompaniments would have to, and were willing to, wait even hours to be attended. Organizations like La Casita Center are extremely important and serve vital roles in the Hispanic immigrant community. Many accompaniments would take days off work or make day trips from other cities in order to be present at La Casita Center. As previously mentioned, La Casita Center is one of the only organizations in Kentucky that serves at the capacity that they do and the current political climate is putting a huge strain on their ability to serve an overly stressed and in need community. Another aspect that is impacting society as a whole and ultimately impacting La Casita Center is the diminishing relevance of an immigrant’s legal status. The current political climate is not only affecting undocumented immigrants, but it has very similar implications to documented immigrants and people of color. This change largely has to do with the idea of the undeserving citizen that even after or with the possibility to receive legal status, most will continue to carry the weight of being a second-class citizen because society, and the current administration, has deemed them to be unworthy of citizenship. The political climate has caused problems that have to do with “the color of my skin, my accent, how the people that are in charge of persecuting my community see me.”¹⁸ Staff members also mentioned that the current political climate is impacting the communities of different religions than the majority practice in this country. La Casita Center is hyper aware of who is being impacted by the hostility of the

¹⁷ Anonymous Interviewee 6. Personal interview. 22 July 2019.

¹⁸ Anonymous Interviewee 1. Personal interview. 1 August 2019.

current political climate and their work and lives bear much of the load of the difficult situations many people are facing, despite having little to work with.

Despite a need for more resources, many staff members recognized that there are actually less resources available to serve the community. Staff members described that the new laws and policies have limited the amount of resources that nonprofit organization and immigrants have access to. The current political climate has put people in positions of power that are “very happy to cut welfare and social service programs.”¹⁹ As a result, La Casita Center has had to cut or has lost partnerships with other agencies, meaning less indirect resources for the organization. These cuts are affecting more than just the Hispanic immigrant community, but many other vulnerable populations. The demographics of the accompaniments that La Casita Center sees are beginning to change with an influx of people that all need more support during the current political climate, such as Muslim Americans and White Americans. More people are facing crisis situations and in higher volumes than has been seen before and more people are going to La Casita Center for help. Another aspect that is changing for La Casita Center is the increasing need to provide mental health services for their accompaniments. Staff members recognize that the current political climate is impacting vulnerable communities emotionally, psychologically, and physically. It is not just affecting a single individual who may now be facing deportation or threats but it affects the entire family and the entire community. The changes being imposed by the current administration are causing more trauma to immigrants than the ones they already bring from their home countries, or their journey across the border, or their experience from navigating a new country. La

¹⁹ Anonymous Interviewee 3. Personal interview. 23 July 2019.

Casita Center recognizes that they have a responsibility to accompany people in their trauma as it has reached a point of such gravity, that many staff members are dealing with secondary traumatic stress.

Staff members have also begun to see an increase in accompaniments that are dealing with violence, particularly domestic violence. As mentioned in the introduction, the Hispanic population makes up the largest minority group in America and many are targeted with anti-immigrant rhetoric, whether they are immigrants or not, in recent years under the current administration. The staff at La Casita Center link violence increase to the current political climate because “people felt entitled to do as they please with our communities.”²⁰ La Casita Center was created as a shelter for domestic violence victims to turn to and although they have shifted to more services and programs, the staff continue to take steps in ensuring that the most vulnerable people in the Hispanic immigrant community are being supported. The support needed for those individuals is increasing more now and I even had the unfortunate responsibility to translate for the volunteer immigrant lawyer one such case of domestic violence against an immigrant by a US resident. It is hard to comprehend that although such an unfortunate event occurred in this family’s lives, it granted the family members who were victimized by violence a small path to citizenship. The current administration has made achieving a legal status so difficult in this country that La Casita Center has to work to find an avenue of hope in the midst of chaotic situations.

While staff members recognized that there have been many changes as a result of the current political climate, they know that not all are bad. Most notably, staff members

²⁰ Anonymous Interviewee 6. Personal interview. 22 July 2019.

that I interviewed stated “there are other communities that otherwise wouldn’t have reached out to the Hispanic, Latino community, or refugee communities, they’re reaching out.”²¹ Some outside of the Hispanic immigrant community are feeling driven to be more helpful and they want to seek out the answer to, as another staff member described it, “how can I be not an evil person during this time?”²² During the volunteer and intern orientation, almost every person present mentioned a personal connection they felt with the organization’s mission, as well as a push from the current political climate to help vulnerable populations in a way the government hasn’t. Although the increase in volunteers and donations has required more capacity to manage all the help, La Casita Center is very grateful to the outside community for their compassion during this time.

Services and programming at La Casita Center are also being reinforced or altered because of the political climate. Legal services have increased dramatically and the legal team has had to increase the number of staff they have in order to fulfill every need that accompaniments come with. During my time at La Casita Center, although every staff member works hard and I do not say this to diminish anyone’s role, the legal staff team leader seemed to be the most occupied and drained of resources. The amount of cases that the legal team receives is so high and demanding that every other staff member at La Casita Center has to know information about legal procedures for immigrants in order to lessen the legal team’s caseload. Many times, the other community liaisons had to step in to ask accompaniments about their case, answer questions they may have, and advise them on what is necessary to do next. The current administration is also making abrupt changes that affect immigrant lives and La Casita Center has to be prepared to know

²¹ Anonymous Interviewee 6. Personal interview. 22 July 2019.

²² Anonymous Interviewee 3. Personal interview. 23 July 2019.

about each action being taken and how to respond. Therefore, during staff meetings, there was always an allotted time set aside to give the legal team members, or any other staff members, the opportunity to give updates on what is happening in terms of legal changes on immigration. The need for reinforcement of legal services has hit the organization and staff members very hard as it has taken much more time and effort than in previous administration, but they also find time to celebrate victories in the distressing times being faced. During some staff meetings, the legal team also mentioned success in sending asylum applications at a faster rate because of the increased support they have received through extra team members. Although reinforcement has come out of an upsetting increase in need from immigrants, the organization is doing amazing work and finding support in amazing ways to continue to serve their community. Furthermore, programming and services are now trying to be a lot more crisis responsive than before. Under the current political climate, Hispanic immigrants are thrust into situations of crisis. Breaking up families and deportations “very easily send the family into crisis—incomes, transportation, just the breakdown of the most basic civic unit is the family.”²³ One particular lunch conversation with a staff member showed the draining and stressful process that detainees are going through, as well as how that is affecting staff. Following threats made by President Trump, La Casita Center made a huge push for know-your-rights workshops, flyers, and general knowledge both in-house and online. With the information shared, La Casita Center urged accompaniments to memorize the organization’s phone number for any questions or emergencies. Crisis response for La Casita Center also means that staff are willingly taking on more cases and more

²³ Anonymous Interviewee 2. Personal Interview. 1 August 2019.

accompaniments. They understand the need is present and try to provide preventative steps to a crisis, but that may not always work. Therefore, they answer every call, every accompaniment that walks through the door, and serve as many needs as possible.

Impacts on Specific Role

Much like the previous question, I continued to ask the interviewees in what ways the current political climate has impacted them, but focused them to think of their specific roles at La Casita Center. Interviewees addressed their increase in work and responsibilities, mental health, a change in focus, and being more cautious about information. In the previous chapter, I was able to discuss the different roles that the staff members at La Casita Center take on, but all are equally willing to help where need be and all spend time working at different capacities than the one that is assigned to them. Despite the different roles, many interviewees answered in similar manners showing that the current political climate is hurting everyone and everything, with no exception.

I have made clear that there has been a dramatic increase in the volume of accompaniments, both adults and children, that go to La Casita Center for services under the current administration. The increase has put a huge workload on the staff members of La Casita Center that was visibly seen, even in the short months that I interned with them. Staff members were having much more conversations about feeling pressured and stressed, and it eventually caught up with many of them. On one particular day during the summer, many staff members were sick and out of the office. On any other day during the summer, their absence would have been extremely stressful, but many chose to call out on the least busy day of the week. I think that many of those staff members recognized the accompaniment flow of that day and chose to wait until that day to take

off. The present staff, including myself, were initially stressed when finding out about the number of missing staff members, with many of them being the main ones that meet with accompaniments. Luckily, the staff members were right to take off on the least busy day and instructions were provided to other staff members on what needed to be done. On a day like that, it is great that other staff members are able to move into other areas and use an egalitarian approach to serve where it is needed, but the current political climate has made this philosophy a little harder than what one would imagine. It is not that staff members are just giving one day to another area, but rather staff members are leaving some of their roles in entirety to pick up responsibilities elsewhere. Many staff members recognize that they have lost their focus on their specific roles and skills because too much is happening elsewhere that keeps them from being able to devote that time. For one staff member, “it doesn’t allow me the time to follow up with the families and with children, which I feel guilty in.”²⁴ Not only do staff have more responsibilities in other areas, but the number of responsibilities is growing because of the need for new services. In particular, mental health services was a new program that La Casita Center implemented because the need was identified by their community, but the need is so demanding that the staff member in charge has trouble feeling comfortable handling every mental health case. The staff member says, “I’m starting to work on being supervised to provide mental health services because I do not feel prepared to work with people who have a level of trauma that is too big.”²⁵ Therefore, the current political climate is pulling the staff members at La Casita Center in a number of different ways

²⁴ Anonymous Interviewee 6. Personal interview. 22 July 2019.

²⁵ Anonymous Interviewee 7. Personal interview. 25 July 2019.

that they may not necessarily be prepared for, but must do in their best attempt at serving the Hispanic immigrant community during this time.

Under the current administration, La Casita Center felt the need to offer mental health services to their accompaniments. La Casita Center recognizes that many of their accompaniments, and Hispanic immigrants in general, do not have the time to work through trauma when they arrive to this country. Under the current political climate, many immigrants are in a constant state of crisis and it is impossible to work through trauma under those conditions. Despite only one staff member having the specific role of mental health services, almost every other staff member interviewed mentioned the trauma that their accompaniments are facing. Many staff members have to work through trauma with their accompaniments, and even with the kids they see. When describing how trauma has increased in recent years, one staff member said, “the newer kids who have come across the border recently have gone through trauma to a larger extent than in the past and so we see that sometimes in their behavior and their willingness to stay or the way they act out.”²⁶ Other staff members also said that “some kids who participate in the summer camp suffer anxiety and have emotional conflicts due to the political climate.”²⁷ At every level, staff members must be conscious to address trauma while also having to be careful to not retraumatize accompaniments, making the work that is being done a lot more difficult. Not only are accompaniments facing trauma, but staff are dealing with those situations as well. When staff members are not able to focus on their specific roles, they feel guilty to the accompaniments they are not able to serve in such a specific manner as they need to be served. One staff member says of the organization that

²⁶ Anonymous Interviewee 5. Personal interview. 18 July 2019.

²⁷ Anonymous Interviewee 9. Personal interview. 25 July 2019.

“if any of the different parts of our structure, of our circle, of our puzzle, of our services, does not have the support, does not have the resources that it needs, it affects everyone else.”²⁸ With limited resources and more demand, each staff member recognizes that they must support other areas of need. Each staff member also working with more accompaniments means that they are exposed to more trauma, and “it is something that each one of us has, you know, some trauma working with our community.”²⁹ While conducting an interview with one staff member, it was quite evident the toll that working with so many accompaniments and trauma can have. The staff member is one of the people that have worked longest at La Casita Center. They had been busy all day and that’s pretty usual for them. When they come out of their office, they often act very tired and drained. During our interview, it became evident that it wasn’t just an act. The staff member was taking long pauses through their trains of thought, they had to close their eyes to think, and you could visibly see them thinking through each question and answer. I had to repeat almost every question I asked. As much as each staff member is vital to the team, under the current political climate, it has become increasingly difficult for staff members to not carry the guilt of their accompaniments with them, the pressures of their work with them, and to provide mental health services without being affected themselves.

For some employees, the role they focus on has changed entirely. As previously mentioned, the staff member in charge of mental health services focuses most of their time on that specific area. Before the current political climate put so much pressure on the Hispanic immigrant population, this service would often get outsourced to organizations

²⁸ Anonymous Interviewee 1. Personal interview. 1 August 2019.

²⁹ Anonymous Interviewee 6. Personal interview. 22 July 2019.

that La Casita Center partnered with. With more accompaniments coming in with mental health needs, this has become a huge focus for one employee in particular, but it has been a priority for all staff members and the organization as a whole. Therefore, one employee has almost entirely pulled back from doing general case management and only attends to accompaniments that need mental health services. Usually, the staff member makes appointments with these accompaniments but on several occasions, they were asked by other staff members to see accompaniments as soon as possible. Another staff member also shared that their specific role changed from doing direct services with case management. The need for clear and accurate communication among Hispanic immigrants is a top priority for La Casita Center. The current political climate is mixing misinformation with fear and that is being spread at a rapid rate. Therefore, one staff member is now in charge of communications to provide for the need for information among the community. The difficulty of this role is that, with the current political climate, as rapidly dispersed and easily accessible as information needs to be, there is a lot of precautions that need to be taken. The staff member mentions seeing a lot of “limitations that I can’t use the term undocumented, because that’s a target and we kind of have to do two steps forward, one step back.”³⁰ Although communications is providing an essential service to a broader audience, there is a lot not addressed in the wrapped up responses that La Casita Center is forced to give in order to avoid fear or information is lost in crisis responses. Another staff member described it as picking their battles—often times they must avoid arguments with other agencies when they are doing something wrong in their efforts to resolve issues fast for their accompaniments. There are two sides

³⁰ Anonymous Interviewee 4. Personal interview. 29 July 2019.

that staff members often deal with: “hostility or the other opposite end that is this kind of savior complex of ‘I just want to help the people, all the immigrants, poor little immigrants’ [...] and that’s not solidarity.”³¹ Staff members often have to set aside their focus in fighting hostility or a savior complex simply because they do not have the space or time to do so. Despite the best efforts to provide clear and accurate information to their accompaniments, the current political climate has made it extremely difficult to address every need and issue that La Casita Center deals with.

Difficulties and Challenges

For another interview question, I asked the interviewees, “in what way has the current political climate made La Casita Center’s work more difficult or challenging?” This question directly asked about the negative consequences of the current political climate. The interview question garnered a lot of similar responses to previous sections of this chapter, but I think that goes to show how hard La Casita Center is feeling those consequences. Staff members mentioned the difficulties and challenges of an increased workload, client situations also impacting staff emotionally, and the legal system continually getting more complicated.

La Casita Center is seeing much more accompaniments and many programs and services are serving constant needs. The organization is seeing 75-100 people a day, regularly. On busier days, that number can increase to 125 people and on event or activity days, like Diaper Day, the organization sees 150-200 people. With that number of people, it is no wonder that resources are almost always running low and the money and peoplepower to serve those needs are missing. To make matters worse, fundings have

³¹ Anonymous Interviewee 8. Personal interview. 29 July 2019.

been cut that has made La Casita Center cut programs and services. For example, “UMA Familias, has pretty much been cut, because we used to have two meetings instead of one meeting a month. We used to provide food, catered food, and that has been cut.”³² This may seem as a small blow to the program, but many families rely on those meetings as a food source and it may take the pressure off finding food to give their kids for one more day. Also, “our community is surrounded by food, you know, our event are all about food”³³ so that cultural component and piece of unity is missing now. The current political climate has required that the organization give more, do more, work more, but with little to accomplish those needs. “It has affected us in the sense that we do not have enough, really.”³⁴ During my time at La Casita Center, this became more evident as staff increasingly got busier to the point of not having enough time to eat lunch before they had to meet with another accompaniment. Staff members could barely make it from one point of the building to another without being stopped by an accompaniment for a “quick” question. In those instances, staff members would go ahead and assist them in that moment and space, would pull them into their office for further assistance, or would ask them to wait until they were done with the current accompaniment. Furthermore, La Casita Center is not only seeing Louisville community members, but they are seeing people from around 37 different zip codes because they are an organization like no other in the state. As much as resources such as money, donations, space, etc. would be extremely beneficial to La Casita Center, it seems that the greatest need for the organization is peoplepower.

³² Anonymous Interviewee 6. Personal interview. 22 July 2019.

³³ Anonymous Interviewee 6. Personal interview. 22 July 2019.

³⁴ Anonymous Interviewee 1. Personal interview. 1 August 2019.

Again, many staff members answered that the difficulties and challenges that have been imposed by the current political climate are that accompaniment situations are affecting staff emotionally. More need, more work, and less resources make for a very distressing mix that the organization is currently facing. In that sense, staff members are wanting to do more and support more, but they simply do not have the capacity to and that is creating compassion fatigue among the organization. Also, staff members are attending to a lot of accompaniments dealing with panic and crisis and that stress is put on them as well. One staff member described it by saying, “people are coming in telling you whatever their crisis situations is, and then you—whether you mean to or not—absorb some of that”³⁵ and it continues to spread throughout the organization. Staff members are dealing with vicarious stress and trauma, while many likely go through their own crisis situations as Hispanic and/or immigrants themselves. Staying hopeful and compassionate to and for each accompaniment is becoming difficult under the current political climate, but La Casita Center recognizes that it is in their agreements and personal values to continually be in solidarity of their community, no matter how hard it gets.

With the current administration enacting a number of policies that affect immigration, the legal system has continually become more complicated to navigate. La Casita Center’s largest program is Legal as it has 25 different services that it provides to its accompaniments. Even with the number of legal services available to people, many accompaniments come in just to ask questions on what is happening and how policies are affecting them, their family, and their community. Even though not every case changes

³⁵ Anonymous Interviewee 8. Personal interview. 29 July 2019.

with a new policy and not every policy affects every immigrant, many are unable to understand the changes and seek information from a source they trust like La Casita Center. As one staff member described it, “part of our job is to help people not panic, and also be realistic with them about what their options are”³⁶ which means another delicate balance must be handled of being brutally honest while trying not to incite more fear into the community. Communication on any legal changes are extremely important to Hispanic immigrants and these take the most work in being sensitive to the broad levels of understanding and languages that accompaniments have. Even staff members that have almost no hand in legal matters at La Casita Center recognize that the legal program is in a constant state of need due to the current political climate. Often times, it felt as though from one day to the next, drastic changes were being made and the organization had to scramble to get and put out information and update services. Therefore, all staff members must continually be updated and informed on any legal changes which can be challenging to keep up with.

Protection

Many staff members at La Casita Center can recall the fear and trauma that many of their accompaniments come with. It is one of the reasons that La Casita Center attempts to be a physically, emotionally, and spiritually welcoming place to *all*, almost acting as a safe haven to the members of the Hispanic immigrant community that they meet. Acknowledging these efforts, one of the interview questions I asked staff members was, “What strategies do staff at La casita Center implement to protect their clients?” Interviewees’ answers addressed confidentiality, what information they asked of

³⁶ Anonymous Interviewee 8. Personal interview. 29 July 2019.

accompaniments, safety of the building, protection of technology, and prioritizing that accompaniments feel safe. Accompaniments need to know that when they go to La Casita Center, they can be vulnerable, honest, and that they will be protected. La Casita Center needs to be one of the few places that members of the Hispanic immigrant community can arrive to and feel safe, especially when the circumstances right outside are telling them otherwise. As one interviewee stated, “what we’re doing here is not well liked in higher administration’s [...] so holding the space and holding the trust of our community also goes into our administration roles.”³⁷

Confidentiality for the staff members at La Casita Center is implemented through a couple of different strategies. Quite obviously, confidentiality means that what is said at La Casita Center stays at La Casita Center and there are a number of ways that the organization works to achieve that promise. If information about an accompaniment is shared, it is only with their permission or only to other staff members. If someone were to ask about one of their accompaniments, one staff member stated, “I can’t talk to them [...] unless they have a written release.”³⁸ Confidentiality ensures that accompaniments can feel comfortable and vulnerable to share their stories and know that it will not leave a safe space. Another way La Casita Center ensures confidentiality is through confidentiality requirements for their volunteers, their interns, and their staff. One interviewee stated that confidentiality at La Casita Center still needs work, but they “provide that [accompaniments] information is private.”³⁹ Not only do staff members make sure they are keeping their accompaniments information safe, they have

³⁷ Anonymous Interviewee 4. Personal interview. 29 July 2019.

³⁸ Anonymous Interviewee 8. Personal interview. 29 July 2019.

³⁹ Anonymous Interviewee 6. Personal interview. 22 July 2019.

confidentiality requirements for their volunteers and interns. Volunteers and interns sign a non-disclosure agreement (NDA), or at the very least they have a conversation of what confidentiality looks like. They are asked not to take pictures on volunteer days and, if possible, asked to dedicate time long-term. La Casita Center works with volunteers to ensure that they understand the accompaniments that come in the space do so “because they are desperate, for the lack of a better word,”⁴⁰ and to truly understand that, it may take more than just a single volunteer experience. Lastly, confidentiality is also seen through La Casita Center’s efforts for identity protections of their accompaniments. Staff members work together to figure out ways that do not require asking information of accompaniments that could put them in danger. While I worked at the front desk, I was responsible for doing new accompaniments intake. The only information I asked was the accompaniments name, their zip code, the country of origin, the language(s) they speak, and how many members in their family. That information was enough for the organization and also did not pose any, or very little, risk to the accompaniment.

In a very similar manner, many interviewees recognized that La Casita Center tries to protect their clients by not asking more information than is necessary. Particularly for the Hispanic immigrants that they accompany, staff members try to avoid asking about documentation status. Interviewees said that the documentation status of their accompaniments is “not our priority”⁴¹ and for childcare, “it simply does not interest us to know if parents have or do not have documents.”⁴² For many other public services, immigrants are bombarded with questions of identification and documentation, so La

⁴⁰ Anonymous Interviewee 4. Personal interview. 29 July 2019.

⁴¹ Anonymous Interviewee 7. Personal interview. 25 July 2019.

⁴² Anonymous Interviewee 9. Personal interview. 25 July 2019.

Casita Center avoids doing that in an attempt to not retraumatize their accompaniments. At La Casita Center, there is no question of whether someone qualifies for services, because everyone is welcome. Besides avoiding information about documentation, La Casita Center also focuses on only asking for very basic information. If the information is irrelevant to what the accompaniment needs or what is going on in that moment with an accompaniment, it is avoided at all costs. For volunteers and interns, knowing what is important information to obtain may be difficult to know. During the volunteer and intern orientation I attended, the volunteer lawyers were also present. The executive director was telling us that we should never ask for an accompaniment's social security number because it shuts people out that do not have an SSN, makes accompaniments feel unsafe, and they lose trust in the organization and its staff members. The family lawyer said that they have to ask for SSN and they have never gotten pushback from any accompaniment. The executive director shared that the organization has previous experience of having cases without using SSN and that the family lawyer should attempt to frame the question for an SSN into it not being because they want to know their personal information, but rather because it is the law. Even with information that is more than basic, the language and approach used can make the difference in making an accompaniment feel safe and protected rather than fearful.

Another strategy that La Casita Center implements to protect their clients is building safety. La Casita Center always has locked and closed doors so during open hours, accompaniments must ring the doorbell and only a staff member or intern can open the door. When opening the door, staff members and interns must look out the window to ensure that it is not anyone that could make accompaniments feel unsafe. One

interviewee said about locking the doors and looking out the window that “originally, it was a safety precaution for our folks who are dealing with intimate partner violence and it’s also become a safety precaution for all these sorts of raids that we’ve been hearing.”⁴³ In another sense, speaking to building safety, a staff member said “we have staff that have been trained in domestic violence response, so able to do things like safety planning with folks that are in violence situations.”⁴⁴ Therefore, building safety means both the physical strategies to ensure that the building is safe, but it can also mean helping create a sense of safety for accompaniments. La Casita Center also has a security plan that ensures every staff member knows what to do and how to protect accompaniments if any number of situations arise. In particular, over the summer months that I spent at La Casita Center, more and more security procedures were being implemented. Emergency plans that are in place include knowing who to call and making sure those numbers are memorized or in a safe place to find them. Going back to creating a sense of safety for accompaniments, the summer camp made an effort to do the same and encourage kids to memorize numbers and have conversations about what to do if certain situations arise within their families.

Just in the past year, La Casita Center has made the switch to using more technology. When I began my internship, I was trained on how to use the data management and intake database from one of the staff members who was well-versed on using it—others were still figuring it out after the switch from paper to computers. But the switch to an online database was a much needed one as it is encrypted and saved in a server. The use of technology has made La Casita Center much more conscious about the

⁴³ Anonymous Interviewee 8. Personal interview. 29 July 2019.

⁴⁴ Anonymous Interviewee 2. Personal Interview. 1 August 2019.

steps they are taking to protect their clients. Still finding themselves using paper files at times, staff members are urging each other to only use them as backup files and to make sure they are shredded or stored in a safe place. One interviewee laughed at the fact that La Casita Center staff members “just recently started changing [their] passwords.”⁴⁵ Staff members had to continually be reminded that at the 6-month mark they must change their passwords. At one staff meeting after many reminders, staff members were asked to raise their hands if they had actually changed their passwords and the number that did was very small. Even the little things that seem unimportant or not a priority are used as points to have conversations about how La Casita Center is holding a safe space and holding the trust of their community to take the necessary actions to protect them when no one else will.

Most importantly, La Casita Center works to protect their accompaniments by making them feel and know they are safe. With so much fear and trauma, Hispanic immigrants desperately need a place to turn to and La Casita Center is creating an environment that is safe. This could mean making sure that people feel seen and heard in society that often ignores their voices, or it could be through attempts of solidarity and watching their backs, such as the ICE watch program. The Alerta Roja (Red Alert) program at La Casita Center serves as a community safety model that watches for signs of ICE being in the area. A group of trusted people come together to address recent fear and any ICE sightings that have been reported, giving people a sense of accompaniment that reaches outside the regular open hours of La Casita Center and outside the building walls. Not only does the program report sightings, but they try to physically arrive and be

⁴⁵ Anonymous Interviewee 4. Personal interview. 29 July 2019.

present at those sightings to document what is happening. Another way to make sure that accompaniments feel safe is to make sure that staff members are being completely honest with them about their situations. Particularly with childcare, it is important that kids know the situations they are in, while also not instilling any early trauma or fear in them. One staff member described it as “a delicate balance of how to disseminate information, especially to younger kids, without fear” and they do that by addressing it to kids as “the same as you prepare for tornadoes or hurricanes or bad weather or fires—you need to plan for this as well.”⁴⁶ Even with precautions, it is inevitable that kids of immigrants will feel fear of ICE, and many staff members have had to have that conversation with kids. When it comes to adults, I noticed that staff members were much more blatant about conversations. I recall one staff member telling immigrants at the Intensive Supervision Appearance Program (ISAP) about the impact of the Trump administration. On another occasion, that same staff member told an accompaniment that the lawyer they had hired was known for exploiting their clients and despite the accompaniments’ situation being likely to end in deportation, there was still a desire to support them in whatever way they could—again, we see a very delicate balance. On another occasion, another staff member was opening the door and went ahead and asked what the accompaniment needed support in. After a few minutes, the staff member told the accompaniment that they had no real options in Kentucky, telling them nothing could be done for them in this state and they had no rights here. Although seemingly harsh, I think these conversations show the gravity of the political climate on immigrants, leaving them no options even when turning

⁴⁶ Anonymous Interviewee 5. Personal interview. 18 July 2019.

to the people and organizations, like La Casita Center, that actually want to help them. On both sides, they have been left helpless.

La Casita Center is facing tremendous challenges and changes due to the current political climate and anti-immigrant rhetoric in the U.S. The organization is having to deal with the fact that their accompaniments are facing more trauma than in previous administrations. The needs that the Hispanic immigrants La Casita Center supports are increasing and more demanding than has been previously seen. Not only are the staff members seeing an increase in need for resources, they are dealing with different needs than in previous years, such as a need for mental health services. Staff at La Casita Center are also having to deal with the stress and trauma from the work they do and it is affecting the ability for staff members to perform their specific roles, as well as towards the general mission of La Casita Center. Due to the consequences of the current political climate, La Casita Center has had to implement strategies to protect their accompaniments and themselves. Despite the immense stress that has risen in recent years, La Casita Center continues to push through the hardships, recognizing the relevance and pressing need for their work.

SECTION FOUR

How receptive is the non-immigrant Louisville community to La Casita Center’s mission and has the current political climate impacted the support La Casita Center receives from the community?

It is not just the current administration that is spewing anti-immigrant rhetoric and hate speech. Along with the administration is a host of people who condone the efforts and actions of the current administration and join in those efforts as well. USA Today reported, “many immigrants, researchers and clinicians say the danger for the immigrant community is not just in Trump’s own language and policies, but in the behavior he empowers with it” (Sanchez 2019). It is a very scary time for immigrants and people of color to be made targets of hate in the current political climate. Although the argument can be made for why immigrants benefit the US population nationally and locally, living in the Trump-backed South does not make it any easier for immigrants to feel safe in their own communities. Therefore, although La Casita Center’s effort is to build a strong and united community in Louisville, it is hard to predict whether the non-immigrant Louisville community feels the same way. Obviously, the entire community of Louisville will not be in agreement with La Casita Center’s pro-immigrant work, but there is a question of what the response is to the current political climate. Therefore, it is important to ask staff members the effects of the current political climate on the reception of their organization and their accompaniments in recent years.

Outside Support

Throughout previous chapters, interviewees have mentioned the difficulties that come with the increasingly hostile political climate towards immigrants. La Casita Center is working almost around the clock to ensure that the Hispanic immigrant community they serve are being taken care of to the best of the organization's ability. Although the staff members play a vital role in the lives of the accompaniments they see, they recognize that they could not do nearly all the work that is necessary without the support from the non-immigrant Louisville community. Therefore, I asked staff members "in what way have other organizations and the people of Louisville been supportive of La Casita Center's work?" Many of the responses for this question have been previously mentioned, but staff members were able to provide more detail about the true meaning and significance of the support that they have received. Interviewees responses included that they see support from individual people of Louisville, but the majority of support is from outside organizations. Outside organizations provide partnerships and collaborations, they provide resources, and they bring awareness to issues that La Casita Center and its accompaniments are facing. On a large scale, the people of Louisville have even come together to create organizations to meet La Casita Center's needs.

One of the more obvious ways that La Casita Center sees support from the outside community is through the resources they provide. One of the main resources that is so necessary for La Casita Center and one that they depend on is funding. With the cuts that the current administration has made, many Hispanic immigrants are unable to find social services to provide for their needs. With the fear of deportations, separation, and a lack of basic necessities, many immigrants are flooding to nonprofits like La Casita Center where the hope is that all their needs will be met. Amid fear and cuts, La Casita Center

has been lucky to stay afloat with a mission to help Hispanic immigrants while the current administration has acted in a way that does more harm than good. To make up for the harm being done, many members of the outside community find that they are able to help in the form of monetary support and that “is really unique in that we have almost half of our budget that is individual donors.”⁴⁷ In some cases, funding is able to provide salaries for the staff. Sometimes funding can be used to make up where other resources aren’t being donated such as food or diapers. Funding can also be used to strengthen services such as buying new technology, like the data management tool that La Casita Center now uses. Rather than take a step back, hide in the shadows, or stay silent against an anti-immigrant administration, La Casita Center has continued to push their platform “openly and transparently because we know at the end of the day our community has our backs.”⁴⁸ Another way that the community has had La Casita Center’s back is through donations. La Casita Center has a food pantry that provides for accompaniments that are in need with food for at least a week. The organization has a clothes closet where accompaniments are able to take as much clothes as they want for themselves and their family. There is also the monthly Diaper Day where mothers can receive free diapers for their babies. For all of these services, donations from the outside community is what allows for accompaniments to get what they need. Unfortunately, because those services are so heavily dependent upon donations, it also means that when there are no donations, those services cannot be given to accompaniments. During my internship, some services, such as the clothes closet, never ran out of resources that were being received from the outside community, but the same cannot be said for the other services. Leading up to

⁴⁷ Anonymous Interviewee 2. Personal Interview. 1 August 2019.

⁴⁸ Anonymous Interviewee 4. Personal interview. 29 July 2019.

Diaper Day, La Casita Center always had to make a big push asking for diaper donations or the event would have to be cancelled and luckily, they always made the deadline. Since my summer internship ended, I have seen posts of at least one monthly Diaper Day being cancelled because there were not enough diapers to meet needs. Donations for La Casita Center make the difference between meeting hundreds of needs or leaving people emptyhanded. Another way that the people of Louisville have supported La Casita Center is through volunteering. Not only are the number of accompaniments increasing as the current political situation worsens for immigrants, but the number of volunteers is also increasing. The increase in volunteers has meant an increase in people power that has been very beneficial to La Casita Center as staff members are able to dedicate more time to their specific roles, rather than being pulled in a million different directions. As much as the volunteers are needed, La Casita Center also recognizes that there is a level of education and understanding that each volunteer must have before they get to work closely with a vulnerable population. As one staff member put it, “Alright, so you are an American citizen, you are a white person, and you want to help. Here are some things that we need to educate ourselves on before we just go like barging in and throwing our weight around and saying this is how things need to be done.”⁴⁹ In order to provide a better understanding to volunteers about the true significance of their time and effort, La Casita Center hosts a volunteer orientation where every value and agreement that the organization believes in is shared and the volunteer is made aware of the philosophies that the organization runs on. Overall, the staff members recognize that the funding, donations, and volunteers that they continue to receive “is really reflecting and showing

⁴⁹ Anonymous Interviewee 3. Personal interview. 23 July 2019.

off that what we're doing here is revolutionary, what we're doing here is needed."⁵⁰

La Casita Center has had the opportunity to have partnerships and collaborations with other organizations. Many organizations see the work that La Casita Center does and they begin to ask how are they able to work together. In some cases, the outside organizations solely want to help La Casita Center in their mission of helping Hispanic immigrants. Staff members identified a number of organizations that help host fundraisers and donation drives where all the benefit goes to La Casita Center. In particular, they identified churches as a major source of their partnerships where "one of the most progressive churches, and the church most in solidarity with the immigrant community, after the current administration was elected, they came and asked us what we needed and [...] that is how we have been able to hire more staff."⁵¹ Organizations like the Center for Women and Families and Jefferson County Public Schools have formal partnerships with La Casita Center where they have official programs every week that happen together with those organizations. There are also many organizations that have informal partnerships with La Casita Center where they are able to refer accompaniments back and forth depending on the available resources and services that are being provided. The partnerships with outside organizations are significant to the staff at La Casita Center because they creates spaces and possibilities for discussion and involvement. The organizations are seeing the need that exists now because of the current administration and they are looking to the right places to see how they can address the current situation. One staff member described it by saying "they want us to work with them on developing that kind of like discussion and I think that's good because it means they are looking to

⁵⁰ Anonymous Interviewee 4. Personal interview. 29 July 2019.

⁵¹ Anonymous Interviewee 1. Personal interview. 1 August 2019.

an organizations that's Latinx lead, as opposed to [...] somewhere else that has really good intentions, but just has major blind spots."⁵² Rather than putting an already vulnerable community out in front of well-intentioned but uninformed people, La Casita Center is able to mediate any potential risks and ensure that they are continuing to accompany their community in the best way possible—both their Hispanic immigrant community and their Louisville community—through their partnerships and collaboration. When La Casita Center hosted its Summer Brunch, it was apparent that the organization was not only focused on their Hispanic immigrant community members, but they equally recognized and welcomed their allies and friends from the non-immigrant Louisville community. Being planted in downtown Louisville, a place that is quite easily accessible, allows La Casita Center the opportunity to build relationships with anyone from the community, no matter who they are or what their situation is, and it is no wonder that their work is recognized as vital by immigrant and non-immigrant members alike.

The people of Louisville and other organizations have supported La Casita Center by bringing awareness to the work they are doing. Many times, new accompaniments arrive to La Casita Center after hearing about it from someone else that got support there or from another organization that referred them to La Casita Center. Sometimes, it can be that other organizations are not sure how to support the Hispanic immigrant families that they see and in those cases, “for me, that's also supporting La Casita because we have this kind of reputation of ‘they’re gonna fix it, they’re gonna do something about it.’”⁵³ La Casita Center is a one of a kind organization that does not give up and does not leave

⁵² Anonymous Interviewee 3. Personal interview. 23 July 2019.

⁵³ Anonymous Interviewee 6. Personal interview. 22 July 2019.

their accompaniments without an answer. Although they are constantly in high demand, they recognize that the work they do is almost impossible to find anywhere else in Kentucky. Therefore, despite the increase in workload, La Casita Center wants the awareness of the community of Louisville to be able to support and walk alongside any Hispanic immigrant that may need it. Not only does awareness bring more accompaniments to La Casita Center, it allows for more support to find the doors of La Casita Center. During my summer internship, there were a few days where the doorbell rang for donations more than it rang for accompaniments that were coming in. With a number of those donations, the donor would inform us that they were on their way to Goodwill to give away good clothes, toys, furniture, etc., until someone else told them about La Casita Center and they quickly decided to change their destinations. Sometimes, not only would they bring the used donated items, but they would also bring along a box of diapers or food that they heard La Casita Center was in need of. Not only are the organizations and people of Louisville raising awareness to the services that La Casita Center can provide, but they are raising awareness to the needs of La Casita Center and its accompaniments.

One of the most amazing ways that the non-immigrant community has been supportive of La Casita Center is by seeing a need and creating a solution for it. More specifically, the people of Louisville have come together to create organizations to support La Casita Center and its community needs. When the current administration took office, one organization known as Interfaith Coalition for Immigrant Justice (ICIJ) was formed to support La Casita Center financially. The organization is made up of individuals, faith leaders, and diverse faith communities who felt driven by their

conscience to respond to the current immigration situation. By supporting La Casita Center financially, they are able to directly provide for staff members' salaries, as well as providing for programs and services. Not only do these organizations provide a way for La Casita Center to keep doing what they are doing, but the organizations are directing attention to what is currently going on for many Hispanic immigrants and how that affects places like La Casita Center. They are creating a space for people who are now finding out about the harm being done by the current administration, or who want to know more, and giving them an avenue to help. Many well-intentioned people often try to hit the ground running with their support, but it may be in misunderstood or even harmful ways when dealing with a vulnerable population. That is why it is so important that organizations and people of Louisville take directive of Latinx-led organizations like La Casita Center. La Casita Center, despite the immense growth spurt it had during the time that I was there, continues to be made up of Latinx members. Even when the possibility arose for a person outside the Latinx community to join the team this past summer, it was done with close scrutiny to ensure that the care and safety of the community was always a priority before they decided to hire them. The staff members, volunteers, and interns at La Casita Center must be very conscious of what their community and culture is about, what they are dealing with, and how to address it. Organizations like ICIJ are pointing the supportive people of Louisville towards La Casita Center where they can put their time and effort, trusting that whatever they do is done consciously and in benefit of the Hispanic immigrant community. On other occasions, organizations like ICIJ are taking the power that they have as White American citizens, as allies, as privileged, and calling upon elected officials to make a change in

their community that allows all people to flourish. In a big way, organizations are being created to show solidarity with their vulnerable community members in Louisville.

Recruitment of Volunteers

La Casita Center has been very fortunate to have a handful of volunteers that they are able to count on. Whether it be for an event or just needing extra hands on a busy day, staff members are aware of a few volunteers that they can contact who will show up quickly. As the current political climate has publicly challenged the lives of many Hispanic immigrants, many non-immigrant members are starting to realize the problems being faced by those in their community. Therefore in order to address the response of non-immigrant community members to the challenges that Louisville Hispanic immigrants are facing, I asked interviewees, “in what ways has the current political climate impacted the number of volunteers that La Casita Center is able to recruit?” All staff members responded by saying that they have seen an increase in volunteers. They connected the increase to the fact that people are responding to the current political climate as well as they are becoming aware of the current political climate. Staff members also mentioned that volunteerism is showing up in more ways than just giving their time, but as volunteers increase so do problems.

One of the few positives that have surfaced from the current political climate is the increase in the number of volunteers that La Casita Center recruits. In fact, one staff member made the point that La Casita Center does not “really have to do any recruitment!”⁵⁴ Instead, the people of Louisville are going to La Casita Center asking questions about how they can support the organization and the Hispanic immigrant

⁵⁴ Anonymous Interviewee 3. Personal interview. 23 July 2019.

community. The demographic of volunteers has also changed as a result of the current political climate. One staff member said, “now we're seeing a lot of youth who come in, Latinx individuals who are first generation Americans who want to help out.”⁵⁵ There are also a lot of volunteers showing up with social justice backgrounds who feel drawn to the current situation that many Hispanic immigrants are facing and feel a need to do something. In many ways, whether people have the social justice background or not, many people are choosing to volunteer with La Casita Center because they are becoming more aware of the current political climate and see volunteerism as a response. Since 1996, the US government has failed to provide any meaningful immigration reform. Therefore, the current administration has continually used a broken immigration system and justified its use with anti-immigrant rhetoric. The state of the current political climate is nothing new, but rather it “has made the quiet parts loud.”⁵⁶ Now more than ever, the non-immigrant Louisville community is hearing about the action being taken by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), such as raids and family separation, as well as police, and they are no longer being complacent to it. They are showing their disagreement and responding to the types of policies from the current administration that endanger the lives of immigrants by volunteering.

The increase in volunteers has created a space for possibilities at La Casita Center. Rather than having only enough volunteers to keep up their current services and programs, La Casita Center and the staff members are able to broaden their scope of support as more volunteers are available to help. Not only do volunteers continue to help in the areas of Child Enrichment or organizing the clothes closet, as they had before the

⁵⁵ Anonymous Interviewee 4. Personal interview. 29 July 2019

⁵⁶ Anonymous Interviewee 5. Personal interview. 18 July 2019.

current political climate, but the increase in volunteers has allowed for different services to be offered. With the awareness about what is currently happening to many Hispanic immigrants, many volunteers are going to La Casita Center and many are willing to help in any way and at any capacity. They are not only offering their time, but they are offering services outside of the ones that La Casita Center is able to offer. For example, volunteers are “bringing prepared food for the community, or offering their time to transport other people, or support at home in cases where a family does not have anywhere to stay today, many times we have American families who offer their homes.”⁵⁷ Another way that La Casita Center began to use volunteers was as security personnel. Shortly after the threat of ICE raids this past summer, the security team at La Casita Center began to recruit volunteers as security personnel for the busier days such as Diaper Day and Legal Clinic Day. Other volunteers were also used to provide an ESL service for the mothers of children enrolled in the pre-school program, La Escuelita, that La Casita Center has. On Tuesdays, children between the ages of 3 and 5 were able to attend La Escuelita and their mothers had to stay at La Casita Center for the duration of the program. Rather than just sitting and waiting for their children to get out of class, two volunteers went to La Casita Center and provided the parents with activities to be done while only speaking English. Although not a complete ESL service, it was the closest thing that La Casita Center was able to offer for the amount of mothers that were present. At the time, it seemed as though ESL services were on the backburner with all the other services in high demand, such as legal and case management, and many accompaniments came for those services alone. During my time at La Casita Center, very few people came

⁵⁷ Anonymous Interviewee 7. Personal interview. 25 July 2019.

in asking for ESL classes and even when they did, we were able to refer them to local libraries where those classes were already being offered. The ability to offer even a makeshift ESL course was only made possible by the fact that volunteers were willing to offer their time and skills to La Casita Center. Volunteers are becoming determined to provide support and they are finding innovative and different ways to do so.

Although volunteers have been of extreme benefit in the current political climate, there are still problems that arise from having more volunteers. For one, the increase in volunteers has been so drastic, that often times the staff members at La Casita Center have to figure out what they are going to do with them. Many times volunteers rush to the organization asking questions of how they can support, and the challenge is “figuring out how to answer those questions in the most effective way.”⁵⁸ Managing the number of volunteers that come in seeking answers has become a huge problem for La Casita Center. Although too many volunteers has caused some added stress as to make sure that La Casita Center is valuing the effort from the people of Louisville during this difficult time, the staff obviously see this as a good problem to have. Another problem that La Casita Center is facing concerning volunteers are the many concepts of volunteerism that the people of Louisville go to the staff members with. Staff members are finding that “in some volunteer, not all of them, is that they have an idea of how they want to help and sometimes that idea does not reflect the need that we have at the moment.”⁵⁹ As more volunteers come in, La Casita Center is having to combat a White Savior Complex with many of these individuals. For La Casita Center this may look turning down volunteers who take the opportunity to work closely with the Hispanic immigrant community as

⁵⁸ Anonymous Interviewee 3. Personal interview. 23 July 2019.

⁵⁹ Anonymous Interviewee 1. Personal interview. 1 August 2019.

self-glorification on social media rather than a genuine desire to figure out how they can help their neighbors and friends build a stronger community. During the summer, while planning big events, staff members were recruiting volunteers to be present and show support. As previously stated, this is less of a recruitment, but rather staff members were picking from volunteers they knew they trusted and had personal relationships with.

When remembering that the livelihoods of many Hispanic immigrants are dependent on the success of fundraising events, it is no surprise that La Casita Center must make sure that their volunteers represent the organization and the accompaniments well. Therefore, with the influx of volunteers, La Casita Center has the opportunity to hand pick volunteers they trust to serve their community, but that does not mean that La Casita Center is ignoring other volunteers who may not have a mindset that fits the needs of the Hispanic immigrant community. Rather, in an effort to ensure that their volunteers are there for the right reasons, or are learning what the right reasons are, La Casita Center is sharing with the volunteers their philosophy of feminism, decolonization, dismantling the patriarchy, and solidarity. Despite the consequences from the current political climate, La Casita Center has seen one positive in the amount of people that are looking to support the vulnerable communities that are at risk. La Casita Center is extremely grateful for the immense addition in people power, but they also recognize the hardships that come along with the increase in hands. With the increase in partnerships with outside organizations and the number of volunteers they see, La Casita Center has seen a major growth among the non-immigrant community in being welcoming and supporting the lives of Hispanic immigrants within Louisville.

CONCLUSION

How This Study Fits Into the Literature

One of the bodies of literature that this research project is situated in is immigrant resources. Much of the literature surrounding immigrant resources focuses on the specific programs and resources that nonprofits are implementing to meet the needs of immigrants. These resources are often related to food insecurity and limited education surrounding immigrants (Greenwald and Zajifen 2017; Zhou 2009). When considering the resources that meet the needs of the immigrant population, staff members at La Casita Center were able to name multiple areas, and as previous literature states, food and educational resources continue to be prominent areas of focus for nonprofits. Through interviews and observations, this research project also made a connection to previous literature that states funding is one of the biggest challenges nonprofits face in meeting immigrant needs. Although many of the resources that previous literature mentions continue to affect nonprofits such as La Casita Center, the timeliness of this research project gives light to the way that the needs of the immigrant community are also changing. As the research project mentions the need for food and educational resources for Hispanic immigrants, it also goes beyond to mention other resources that are in high demand given the current political climate. For La Casita Center, staff members recognize that legal services and individual case management are the resources that have seen the greatest demand. Even as the staff members at La Casita Center already give much of their time and effort to legal services and case management, when asked about

filling a gap of need, many staff members stated those areas were still seeing the greatest need that must be fulfilled. Throughout the entirety of this research project, it is evident that the current political climate has impacted the resources that immigrants need and La Casita Center, while maintaining that the resources they already had meet immigrant needs, must evolve in what areas their efforts and resources are focused on. Literature about immigrant resources also addresses advocacy and how nonprofits use their platform to support immigrant lives. Literature from Lebal et al. (2012) mentions strategies such as media and legislative advocacy that nonprofits are using and this research project adds different strategies for advocacy. La Casita Center used their media platform to show support for their community of Hispanic immigrants and raise awareness to the current state of immigration, but they also showed support in the language that they used. For La Casita Center, changing the language that surrounded immigrants, such as from illegal to undocumented, was a strategy of focus. By changing the language, the organization was hoping to change the narrative surrounding immigrants that justified the anti-immigrant action and rhetoric that is currently taking place in this country. Although La Casita Center recognizes that the strategies they use to show support for immigrants may not change an entire country, they believe that what they are doing is cause for change at least within their walls, within the community they accompany, and within their support network.

Another body of literature that this research project situates itself in the concept of the undeserving citizen. Even before the current administration took office, immigrants have been faced with legislation and language that bars them from ever being seen as true citizens, whether they are documented or not. Living in a society that dehumanizes

immigrants and makes them second-class citizens allows for the current political climate to continually harm the livelihood of immigrants. Therefore, the prejudice and policies that create the undeserving citizen have forced nonprofit organizations to fill a gap in what should be government-supplied services to immigrants. Throughout my time at La Casita Center, the narrative of the underserving citizen was continually seen as accompaniments flooded the organization with high demands and needs, especially in the current political climate. Although not having nearly the capacity to serve at the extent that the government could, nonprofits that are devoted to their missions of helping marginalized and vulnerable communities must fill that governmental role. Not only does the idea of the underserving citizen create the needs that are being addressed by La Casita Center, but it also poses a new challenge to staff who are now met with a new demand in the current political climate—how can immigrants become citizens? The Hispanic immigrants that La Casita Center served were seeing the challenges and difficulties of their current situations and had come to understand that the only way out was to become U.S. citizens. Many accompaniments who came in with questions related to the path to citizenship were returned with answers that gave little hope, as their bodies alone were seen as characteristics that made them undeserving of citizenship. Accompaniments, and the immigrant community in general, continually must make the argument that they are deserving of being citizens and many work hard to do so. Nonprofits like La Casita Center work hard on both ends try to give their accompaniments opportunities to be citizens, while also recognizing that even if they were granted citizenship, the color of their skin, their language, their accents, and their nationalities would forever label them otherwise. This research project adds to the literature surrounding underserving citizens

as nonprofits like La Casita Center must meet the needs of many immigrants that have been neglected by the government, while also facing a new angle to the idea of the undeserving citizen who wants to become a citizen, but has to fight an anti-immigrant and white supremacist society that keeps them from doing so. Despite La Casita Center's endless work to support the lives of Hispanic immigrants, it is done with recognition that the need for their resources should not be so demanding, or simply should not be present at all, and is only made necessary because of the oppressive systems they are fighting against.

CBPAR

The goal of this research project was to examine and understand the role that nonprofit organizations play in immigrant lives, with particular focus on the effects of the current political climate. I used Community Based Participatory Action Research (CBPAR) to address the vulnerability of the focus population, as well as to ensure that the benefit of this research project be for the nonprofit organization, first and foremost, and not for the researcher or institution. CBPAR was used in conducting interviews with 9 staff members, who all volunteered and signed up to participate in the research project. Observations were also conducted on most days that La Casita Center was seeing accompaniments, as well as during event days and staff meetings. Interviews and observations were focused on examining the three objectives of this project:

1. Analyzing how La Casita staff decide which resources and projects to implement.
2. Considering how the current political climate has affected La Casita Center and the resources and projects they choose to implement.

3. Examining staffs' perspectives on how receptive the broader Louisville community is to the immigrant community that La Casita Center serves and whether that has changed in recent time.

Five interview questions were used to address the first objective. To sum up the responses and observations that were made to address the first objective, one staff member I interviewed said, "Every accompaniment we have reflects a need and they were all created because the community and the people and the families that we accompany identified, in one way or another, those needs."⁶⁰ La Casita Center recognizes that working with a vulnerable community, such as Hispanic immigrants, requires a lot from their staff members. It requires that staff members be equipped to handle trauma, an immense and increasing demand, and a never-ending need. In their best attempt, La Casita Center works endlessly to meet every need that their accompaniments have through the resources and projects they implement. The organization recognizes that they may not be able to fulfill every need, but with every accompaniment, they attempt to give them answers that guide them to find the resources that they need.

Four interview questions were used to address the second objective. One staff member that I interviewed had this to say about the effects of the current political climate: "it has caused a lot more people, in very large volumes, to come [to La Casita Center]."⁶¹ Another staff member also mentioned that, "La Casita Center has changed programming a lot to try to be more crisis responsive."⁶² The current political climate has put a lot of stress and fear on the Hispanic immigrant community and La Casita Center is

⁶⁰ Anonymous Interviewee 1. Personal interview. 1 August 2019.

⁶¹ Anonymous Interviewee 7. Personal interview. 25 July 2019.

⁶² Anonymous Interviewee 2. Personal Interview. 1 August 2019.

left responsible to handle the stress and fear of their accompaniments. During my time at La Casita Center, it became evident that many of the staff members were carrying the weight of that stress and fear with them as more and more conversations were being had about self-care and making sure to not bottle up emotions. It is quite obvious that the current administration has implemented actions that harm the livelihoods of many Hispanic immigrants and La Casita Center continues to do the work that many nonprofits are doing in fulfilling the gap that the government has left.

Lastly, two interview questions were used to address the third objective of this project. La Casita Center has been situated in Louisville, Kentucky for the entire existence of the organization. One staff member described the awareness of La Casita Center by saying, “I believe that for a long time, the society of the population of Louisville was not conscious—was not aware of the existence of La Casita,” but with the current political climate and the attention being drawn to the immigrant population, “the people are more conscious; the people are having a better understanding of what is happening and they are saying ‘Let’s go see in what way we can help.’”⁶³ Staff at La Casita Center recognize that they are seeing an influx in support from volunteers and organizations in Louisville due to the current political climate, and they call it out as being one of the only positives that has come out of the current administration.

As part of CBPAR, I worked to make sure that La Casita Center and its staff members knew that the ultimate goal of this research project was to make them aware of their impact in immigrant lives. Before I started my internship, I had an interview via video conference with the staff members who asked me questions pertaining to my

⁶³ Anonymous Interviewee 9. Personal interview. 25 July 2019.

experience working with a vulnerable population such as the Hispanic immigrant community. During the video conference, I informed the organization that if given the opportunity to be an intern, on top of completing the responsibilities of an intern, I would also be conducting a research project that included interviews and observations. All staff members were in agreement. Once my internship started, during a weekly staff meeting, I informed the staff members that I was using CBPAR and my reasoning for that type of research—its focus on social change, conducting research *with* participants, and bringing the organization benefit. Many staff members were grateful for the work that I was doing as both an intern and researcher. During another staff meeting, I reminded the staff members, once again, that I was conducting a research project and that I would be doing interviews. I passed around a sign-up sheet and made the staff members aware that interviews were completely voluntary and anonymous. Some staff members felt uncomfortable taking part in interviews for various reasons and decided to not participate. Throughout my internship, I had the opportunity to discuss my research project further with some staff members who would ask me questions about its progress, and they would often offer input or observations that I should incorporate. There were also conversations being had about how I could change the language I used to incorporate that philosophies of the organization and many of those suggestions shaped the writing of this thesis. Most of these conversations I had with staff members were added to my daily observations and some were chosen to be a part of the final product of my thesis.

Through the meetings and conversations I had with La Casita Center's staff members, I worked to ensure that their voices were being elevated throughout the entire project and

that the final product would reflect the way that La Casita Center is creating social change.

Throughout my research project, I attempted to implement CBPAR's cyclical model of research. For the planning component, I planned interview times to be conducted on certain days, after hours and observations to be done daily. As CBPAR does not follow linear steps and recognizes changes could arise, there were many interviews that had to be rescheduled after staff members missed their schedule time due to still being with accompaniments after hours or having too much work left to do after hours. Observations could not be done every day that I was at La Casita Center due to some days being busier than others and I was unable to have a moment to write observations or even make observations for my research project. For the reflection component, during or after many interviews, I noted the nonverbal behaviors of the staff members that reflected the effects of the work they do. After a day of observations, I reflected on the day as a whole and added any last observations about the day. I also reflected on the assumptions I made and how my position as a Hispanic daughter of immigrants, passionate about the work La Casita Center was doing, and as an intern and researcher affected the observations I made. For analysis, much of this component was done during the transcription and coding process of the interviews, where I was able to divide the interview questions and their answers into what research question they corresponded to. The same can be said about observations where I analyzed how and where observations fit into the three key research questions of this project. Lastly, for action, I put together the findings and wrote the remaining sections of this thesis. I have also been keeping up with La Casita Center through their social media pages, as well as

keeping contact with a few of the staff members. I also made a community report of the findings of this research project to send to the staff members at La Casita Center. Overall, I believe that this project fulfilled the goals of CBPAR in focusing on the participants and creating an opportunity for social change. I hope that the final product of this thesis reflects the hard and necessary work that La Casita Center is doing for the Hispanic immigrant community.

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