

IN LAK'ECH DENVER ARTS

MISSION

In Lak'ech Denver Arts is an after-school program that increases access to **free** high-quality community responsive arts education to 5th-12th grade BIPOC youth who live in systemically underserved neighborhoods in southwest Denver. In Lak'ech students grow their skills in Dance, Drama, Music, and the Visual Arts while learning how to use the arts as a tool to broaden their social awareness, create cross-cultural connections, and inspire positive social advocacy within their communities and beyond.

Executive Director Marianna Lucero identifies as a Xicana, and was born and raised in Southwest Denver. She served her community as a Maestra (teacher) for almost ten at Goldrick Elementary where she taught Dance and Drama. Marianna has also been a company member of the Su Teatro Cultural and Performing Center since 2007, a space where she learned how to tell stories and to look to her ancestors for guidance and truth. Marianna shares the same cultural background and experiences as the community she serves with her programming, and that direct connection to Southwest Denver, and her students played a huge role in cultivating the mission for In Lak'ech. The name, In Lak'ech (Mayan): "Tu eres mi otro you. You are my other me", encapsulates her program's vision, a world of mutual respect, in which our collective humanity is honored through the lens of the arts. The community Marianna serves believes its youth are resilient and strong, but they face economic barriers and lack opportunities to maximize their talent and creativity, and the tools that can help them to transcend the obstacles they face.

WHAT SERVICES IN LAK'ECH PROVIDES

Currently, all of In Lak'ech's programming is provided on site in Westwood. Youth participants come from many of the surrounding neighborhoods in southwest Denver, and for the last three years, the organization has been able to provide **free** culturally relevant arts programming to its students. Weekly classes serve 60 youth total and meet for two-hour sessions each. Program offerings include: a Youth Folklorico Dance Team (Mondays), a Youth Mariachi group (Tuesdays) and Youth Visual Arts classes (Thursdays), where students collaborate to create special cultural art installations for large community events in Westwood. In Lak'ech also holds a free 10-day youth summer arts camp called "Puppets in Westwood", where 20 student participants learn about the art of puppetry and work to design and build their own custom puppets to retell different cultural stories at a live community performance. All classes are taught by local BIPOC artists who share the common passion of cultural preservation by teaching the next generation about their ancestors' joy and resilience through the arts. She feels honored to have partnered with D3Arts, Re:Vision, Hecho en Westwood, and Bucu West, and looks forward to continuing to build new relationships with additional partners in southwest Denver.

HOW WILL IN LAK'ECH USE THE ACCELERATOR GRANT

Unrestricted funding, like the Accelerator Grant, is most needed as it can unlock additional dollars for In Lak'ech's work. With unrestricted funding, Marianna can meet the criteria placed on her by her fiscal sponsor of having the upfront funds to then be able to apply for larger, reimbursement-based grants to help sustain her growing programming goals.

Additional funding would also help continue existing programming and help supply necessary materials for students to participate in the folklorico, mariachi and visual arts classes that In Lak'ech provides for

free. It would also help pay the BIPOC contracted artists a fair living wage for their time and expertise. Marianna would also like to expand her programming by developing weekly drama classes and developing a website that the community could use to learn more about In Lak'ech and register for free programming.

Finally, Marianna will use Accelerator Grant funding to help her transition into her own 501(c)(3) within the next three years. A goal she is currently working towards by developing a strong infrastructure to ensure a confident transition. Marianna will also hire a part time program manager, bookkeeper, and contract with a grant writer, so she will be able focus more on implementing In Lak'ech's mission and vision by continuing to build relationships and partnerships, meeting with new funders, and being the face of the organization to enable its continued growth.

SUMMARY/HIGHLIGHTS OF SITE VISIT

- Marianna is a passionate Executive Director of this new, but already important, community resource for the youth in Southwest Denver. The site visit team was completely convinced as to her ability to lead this organization.
- While Marianna had the skills to teach her students, she had never run a nonprofit. That didn't stop her. While starting a nonprofit has been a steep learning curve for Marianna, she has sought out several resources to help her grow as a leader. She was selected into the prestigious Moonshot EdVentures fellowship, a program that she says changed her life and gave the resources and knowledge to plan and develop In Lak'ech. Marianna continues to build her capacity as a nonprofit leader by attending bi-weekly professional development with Moonshot EdVentures, an organization that is building a pipeline of diverse leaders to design innovative learning environments for students of color in Metro Denver. Moonshot EdVentures has also continued to support Marianna for the last several years due to their belief in the work she is doing and her ability to provide this important resource to her community. Marianna also attended Red Rocks Community College on a full scholarship and received a certificate in Nonprofit Management to further support her business skills for running a nonprofit. The site visit team is impressed with Marianna's drive, dedication, and commitment to building this nonprofit to be strong, well managed and community-serving, and they are not the only ones as evidenced by the external support she has been able to secure.
- In Lak'ech is currently leasing a space in Re:Vision (a classroom with adjacent outside space) and using the gallery space at Cultura Chocolate when more room is needed. Marianna currently caps class size at 20 so the current location is easily sustainable for the foreseeable future.
- Marianna has learned that her students, many of whom played a role in designing the mission for In Lak'ech Denver Arts, appreciate and value her efforts to broaden their social awareness, cross-cultural connections, and positive social advocacy as well as deepening their artistic talent.
- In Lak'ech's classes are always full thanks to the support from her blossoming partnerships, sharing classes on Facebook neighborhood pages, and word of mouth because of the community connections Marianna has already made. Imagine how many more 5th – 12th graders in the Southwest Denver community she can serve with greater resources. She says, "I am still learning. The community and students are teaching me. When I see the fire in the students' eyes, I know I will never give up!"