

ROOTS FAMILY CENTER

MISSION

“Growing the next generation of confident, compassionate, healthy children who are rooted in the culture and strengths of their families.”

In 2016 Denver Public Schools, Parent Possible (formerly Colorado Parent and Child Foundation) and other institutions identified Southwest Denver as critically underserved in terms of Spanish speaking families with young children. Specifically:

- 35-46% of young Spanish speaking children are not ready to read by the first grade.
- Have not been exposed to early childhood programs.

Crystal Munoz was aware of these realities given her twelve years of experience as Chief Operating Officer of Focus Point Family Resource Center where she provided oversight for a variety of wraparound programming and services for low-income Spanish-speaking families. She approached Denver Public Schools and Parent Possible with the concept of **a home visitation program to improve the school readiness of Spanish-speaking children 0-5 years of age**. With Crystal’s “roots” being in Southwest Denver she returned to live in Westwood and created Roots Family Center.

WHAT SERVICES DOES ROOTS FAMILY CENTER PROVIDE

Roots Family Center provides two early childhood, evidence-based home visitation programs for young children: 1) Parents as Teachers (PAT) and 2) Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPI). These programs are consistently shown to be effective home visiting models to help ensure that parents can serve as their child’s most valuable teacher, trainer, and mentor. Additionally, national studies report that these programs are especially effective with Spanish-speaking families who face the challenges associated with poverty: improving parenting skills, childhood academic outcomes and school behavior. The programs include robust assessment processes to create a baseline that helps guide the home visitors work.

Critical to the success of both programs are:

- Crystal Munoz, Roots Executive Director’s twelve years of experience at Focus Points Family Resource Center and Alejandra Lopez, Bilingual Program Coordinator of the HIPPI program has worked with home visitation programs for fifteen years. Under the leadership of Crystal and Alejandra, Roots has 3 PAT and 3 HIPPI home visitors who each manage a caseload and offer staffing support.
- Home visitors are hired from the community being served. Being a member of the same community helps build trust and rapport. Most of the home visitors are past participants in the Roots programs.
- There are not many programs or resources available to Spanish-speaking families in their native language.
- Five volunteers provide approximately 100 hours of volunteer service per program year in the preparation of materials and planning special events to support Roots.

- Families usually stay in the program for a total of 6 years if they start when their child is a newborn. If they come at an older age, most of the families stay until their child has completed the curriculum.

HOW WILL ROOTS USE THE ACCELERATOR GRANT

Roots Family Center has reached a pivotal moment. Since its founding, Roots has grown significantly and there are now waiting lists for the organization’s programming. In order to successfully respond, Roots must be equipped with the internal capacity to do so. The grant will enable Roots to grow its capacity to meet the following goals over the next 1-3 years:

- Collaborate with a range of community partners to ensure a continuum of services.
- Serve 10 additional families for a total of 85 children birth to five and their parents.
- Recruit, employ, train and support home visitors from the targeted neighborhoods.
- Provide trauma-informed and infant mental health services for young children enrolled in all Roots programs.
- Work with pregnant families through a pilot doula program to improve maternal and child health outcomes and foster infant cognitive development.

SUMMARY/HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE SITE VISIT

- Crystal Munoz is an extraordinary leader and mentor. She is passionate, dedicated to improving educational and health outcomes for her community and resourceful.
- Crystal and Alejandra bring lived experience in the Hispanic community, experience in early childhood education and are committed to holistically supporting families to maximize positive outcomes. They recognize the challenges the home visitors face when meeting with families who live in very difficult situations. To address this, they have established an ongoing development effort and support system for home visitors to foster their growth, keep them engaged and prevent burnout. This critically important, multi-faceted support system is led by Alejandra and includes:
 - One hour for reflective practice.
 - Time with a mental health consultant.
 - Guidance on communicating, listening and building trust.
 - Time to address challenges the team members experience in working with families.
- All team members are involved in or connected with other community-based resources. These connections are valuable when referring families to additional resources.
- The 98% retention rate is rate is significant.
- In response to our question about the likely impact of Denver public schools’ new pre-K program, Crystal noted the following regarding the Roots model:
 - It is a resource to support parents as teachers. The Home Visitors model is more attainable for families based on their work schedules and language barriers.
 - The Home Visitors operate bi-lingually and there is a “continuum” of connection across several years. Of particular importance is the credibility of the Home Visitors who are moms who were participants in the program.