



Bienestar

Building housing, hope and futures

Semillas de Exito (Seeds for Success) Programs for Adult Residents of Bienestar

- Important enough to devote several paragraphs to its description, an innovative Promotores Program model has become central to the effectiveness of all of Bienestar's service programs. This program utilizes 15 of our own residents, who are carefully chosen for their capacity to act as "promoters" as well as role models for other residents. It is innovative because residents are chosen from each property and receive training and information that prepares them to provide home visits to their own neighbors. This model of neighbor visiting neighbor reduces the barrier of anxiety felt by our residents of welcoming strangers at their door. Also an innovation, while Promotores Programs typically promote messages related to public health topics and illness prevention, Bienestar's program covers a much broader array of topics related to thriving. Most important, the Promotores communicate opportunity for youth and adult enrichment programs offered by Bienestar. Each time a new program is introduced, the Promotores are briefed and then include the information in each home visit or contact. As a trusted source of information, they are effective recruiters for our programs. Each of the 15 provide at least 40 home visits annually, documenting each visit and meeting with staff and other Promotores weekly to share issues and brainstorm solutions.

Perhaps the most important function, they serve as the eyes and ears for staff to better track the well-being and imminent needs of our residents. As neighbors, the contact between each Promotore and their neighbor is not limited to home visits, as they may see each other in the parking lot or playground. This contact helps support the overall well-being of our residents and has been especially important over the course of the recession when ongoing communication resulted in several services designed to support residents who were losing jobs and in danger of losing their homes. Staff started a job club that met weekly, where staff coached residents in resume development and provided the most recent job openings in the area. A partnership with Oregon Food Bank supplied food for a food bank included in the weekly meetings of Job Club, helping to lessen food insecurity. In response to information that a number of residents were depressed, staff acquired grant support and hired a bilingual/bicultural counselor. Mental health issues are not easily shared by Latinos so the role of the Promotores was especially important during this time. Staff report that the integration of the Promotores in their communities, and a counseling program for referral of residents suffering from depression prevented what could have developed into tragic situations.

As residents lost jobs, they were afraid to come to Bienestar management; they did not understand that Karen Shawcross and her staff would try to help them, expecting to be evicted instead. However, as Promotores reported each job loss, they were contacted by Bienestar's Program Manager who interviewed them to determine which programs would be of greatest help. A financial strategy to help prevent loss of homes was developed. This with Job Club, the Food Bank, the Emergency Cash program and Summer Lunch and Fun all help during times of job loss.

- ESL Classes – Easily the program most in demand, Bienestar provides English as a Second Language classes on-site for adults. Participants are screened and entered into one of 3 levels - A, B, or C. Four class sessions were provided in one location in 2010-11 in order to accommodate work schedules and level of skill. Outcomes are encouraging. In the A level classes, the average entrance test score was 3.1. After meeting 12 times for two hours their test scores were 7.6. In the B and C level classes they already knew the aforementioned concepts and the entrance test score for the grammar test was 5.3. It increased to 5.6,

the comprehensive story scores increased from 6.3 to 7.3, and in the listening section scores improved from 5.3 to 6.25. One of the B classes met 12 times for two hours a week, while the other met 24 times for three hours a week.

A session was held in a second location in spring 2011. For this class a new assessment developed by Bienestar staff was used (more comprehensive than the previously used assessment); with a total of 39 points. The average score on the pre-assessment of all 19 students who attended the first class was 17.43. After 10 weeks of class of an hour and a half, the students who took the post-assessment increased to an average of 31 points.

- GED Classes - Preparation classes for GED certification are offered year-round for adults and teens taught by Bienestar staff member Juan Carlos Aguilera. Residents preparing for their GED testing are determined – they have been known to vote to continue classes during times of heavy work hours, as well as during traditional vacation times. This program involves a small number of participants at a time, all requiring intense instruction. It has been successful in coaching participants who attain their GED.
- Basic & Intermediate Computer Classes – Two levels of computer classes are taught during the evenings for adults by staff instructors at the Bienestar properties with computer labs, including Sunset Gardens, Montebello, Reedville and Jose Arciga Apartments. Donations of computers have been received from Spring Ridge Academy in Arizona, Synopsys & Intel, allowing expansion of our program to more properties. Outcome reports from 2011 have indicated excellent gain in skills and knowledge related to computer use.
- Financial Literacy Classes: Basic, Intermediate, Advanced - In 2009 a new three-year program, “Crece Su Dinero” was launched. It begins with the very basics and then provides information about homeownership, micro enterprise and asset building strategies in the third year.
- Adult IDA program - Once residents complete the basic Financial Literacy course, they are eligible to enroll in Bienestar’s adult IDA program. (run in partnership with Adelante Mujeres) Through the IDA Program, families save for homeownership, education or to start a small business. When they reach their savings goal their savings are matched 3:1. Several participants have opened IDA accounts.
- Community Gardens - Small community garden plots are available to residents at Reedville, Jose Arciga, Jose Echeverria, and Elm Park apartments. 50 families maintain garden plots growing vegetables to augment their food supply. Residents exhibit great pride in their gardens, involving their children in tending the plots.
- No Cost Income Tax Preparation - Bienestar provides Income Tax Return preparation at no charge for our residents as well as for the community with support from the United Way of the Columbia-Willamette. It has been an important service to provide this free service as we have been the only agency in Washington County to provide the families with bilingual tax services. Our program provides an alternative to advertised services targeting our Hispanic residents that may not follow the law or represent their client truthfully in their tax preparation.
- Job Club - Bienestar’s Job Club was launched in January, 2009 in response to the numbers of resident families experiencing job loss and reduced hours of work and pay. Plans for responding to the urgent needs of families were made with Bienestar staff Gracie Garcia, Maria Moreno and Jorge Tello. Partners Mary Lewis of Worksource Oregon Employment Department, Paula Moore from Dress for Success were engaged in the effort. Just under 50% of participants found employment through this program.
- Emergency Cash Assistance Program – A fund is maintained by Bienestar for families facing financial crisis. It may be help with utility bills, food, diapers, or car repairs, but has been especially important during the recession as residents saw their work hours reduced or lost their jobs. Approximately XX families have been assisted over the past 2 years.

- Mental Health Counseling – With the observation of Bienestar Promotores and staff that some residents were suffering from severe depression, grants were obtained to support hours of a bicultural/bilingual mental health provider. Even in this population that is adverse to acknowledging mental illness, the counselor saw adults, children, couples and families. Many were helped.
- Born to Learn – While the Born to Learn Program was started to directly benefit the babies and toddlers at Bienestar, it is a program for parents. Local Head Start instructors had reported that young children from Bienestar apartments were starting Head Start already behind other children at age 3! This proved to be a common issue for Hispanic immigrant families nation-wide and inspired Bienestar staff to research effective programs for implementation. The Born to Learn Program is a parenting course with emphasis on how parents can relate to and communicate with their children. It teaches how playing with their children provides needed stimulation that helps prepare babies to learn, but also enriches the parenting experience.
- Audubon Family Outings – The Audubon Society provides several outings for families annually. These focus on activities in the outdoors, highlighting appreciation of our environment and the outdoors. It introduces our families to recreational activities that are nearby and can be enjoyed at no cost. The program also reinforces what many of the children have learned in our Explorador Camp or at school.
- Special event meetings & presentations are part of life at Bienestar. The Promotores provide information about important topics at residents meetings that are relevant to our residents and invite speakers as well. Topics might include dangers of predatory lending or health issues.
- Annual resident meetings/BBQ – Annual events at each apartment property, these provide a social venue for residents at each apartment community to get together, and to have an opportunity to share issues or concerns with staff.

All of these programs are only accomplished with the cooperation of many community partners. A one-page list of these partners is included, as well as a few pictures of our programs for children and youth. Our web site includes many pictures as well as outcome reports for all programs. It is www.bienestar-or.org.