



Latin American Youth Center

VPP Investment Partner Series



■ The Latin American Youth Center

When Lori Kaplan went to volunteer at the Latin American Youth Center in 1979, she found a “beehive of activity” where kids and young adults were working side by side, helping one and another learn, grow and find their way in a new culture. Most of the young people were newly arrived immigrants from Spanish-speaking Caribbean countries. Their young lives had been marked deeply by the stress of dislocation, poverty, language barriers and feeling unwelcome. At LAYC, they found a place to be themselves, to sing, to dance, to learn, and to tell stories that celebrated who they were.

LAYC has grown considerably over the years and serves a broad population of young people from Latin America and other regions, but for Lori, who has been its director since 1984, the essence of the center is the same. “I am touched every day by something that reminds me that we are making a difference in people’s lives. Some days it’s a beautiful piece of art that reveals a young person’s hopes and dreams, or something they write about overcoming their fear and hurt.

“I was just 11 years old when I first stepped in the LAYC,” writes 18-year-old Jesus Amaya in an LAYC newsletter. “Coming to the LAYC was a chance to escape the gangs and drugs and violence that were going on around me. The LAYC has been my home away from home. It had resources I couldn’t get other places.” Through his participation in several programs and activities at LAYC, Jesus and many of his friends see a new world of possibilities. He is planning to go to college to study engineering and architecture. “If it weren’t for the LAYC, I would have probably been on the streets, involved in a gang. The youth center helped me get my life going.”



■ Profile

The Latin American Youth Center (LAYC) serves multicultural youth in Washington, DC and Maryland with a comprehensive set of social services and educational, work skills, advocacy, and residential programs. The LAYC Network includes three charter schools.

Facts

Founded: 1974

Executive Director: Lori Kaplan

Chair, Board of Directors: Noel Bravo

2005:

Budget: \$9.3M

Children Served: 4,812

Mission and History

The Latin American Youth Center (LAYC) was founded in 1974 to serve the needs of Caribbean, and later, Latin American youth who had recently arrived in Washington, DC. Its mission is “to support youth and families in their determination to live, work, and study with dignity, hope and joy.” As the demographics of the Adams Morgan, Columbia Heights, and surrounding neighborhoods changed, LAYC programs grew to include Latino (70%), African and African-American (28%), and Asian (2%) teens and young adults. Today the organization provides a wide range of educational, social, and job-related programs targeting youth between the ages of 12 and 21. Within its multilingual and multicultural environment, LAYC strives to counteract the effects of poverty and racism. Their programs help youth develop critical thinking and leadership skills, support educational success, and, through the visual and performing arts, address cultural differences and difficult social issues.

Services

The LAYC provides academic assistance, employment and wraparound services for low-income and at-risk youth, serving approximately 1,000 youth on an ongoing basis and thousands more through a variety of outreach programs. Their over 40 offerings include educational enhancement programs, work skills development, and social services. Three charter schools serve various tailored needs for children and young people:



The Next Step/El Próximo Paso Public Charter School was founded in 1996 as a learning environment for youth, many of them immigrants, who have dropped out of school or have never been enrolled in school in the U.S.



The Latin American Montessori Bilingual (LAMB) Public Charter School was founded in 2003 as a self-directed learning environment for youth ages 3-12, where students are learning a second language, either English or Spanish, in a multicultural environment.



The YouthBuild Public Charter School, which combines the proven YouthBuild employment skills program with a GED curriculum, opened in the fall of 2005.

Notable Awards and Honors

- Received the Annie E. Casey Foundation Families Count Award, 2002



■ Performance Summary and Fact Sheet

Summary

The LAYC is a stronger organization and considerably better positioned to extend its reach and impact to serve communities of dire need in Maryland, following regional demographic trends, than it was in 2003. Its effectiveness and sustainability have increased as well (see table). The LAYC surpassed original expectations, which resulted in VPP increasing its multi-year investment by an additional \$900,000 for a total investment of \$1,824,191.

Key Information

- *Date, years, and stage of VPP Investment:* March 2003; 2.75 years, (mid-stage; partially funded)
- *Capital committed and disbursed by VPP:* \$1,824,191 committed; \$819,191 disbursed
- *Estimated children to be served in 2010:* 6,323
- *Revenue increase & % budget growth:* \$5.3 to \$9.3 million – 75% in four years
- *Leveraged funding:* \$2.5 million
- *Expansion to new places and coverage:* Three new centers in two new Maryland counties and opened LAYC Youth Build Public Charter School

Aspiration and Goals

After serving youth in the District of Columbia for over thirty years, the LAYC sees a timely opportunity to expand for the first time outside the borders of DC into the Langley Park community of Prince George's County, Maryland. The Latino population in this poverty-stricken neighborhood has grown by 80% over the last fifteen years, and there are few services tailored to youth. At

the same time, gentrification and other forces are changing the ethnic and socio-economic demographics of the LAYC's traditional area of service, Columbia Heights, DC. They plan to serve an additional 1500 youth over the next five years through new centers in Maryland and by maximizing existing program capacity in DC to reach 500 more youth for a total increase of 2,000. They also plan to deepen their impact by improving the effectiveness of their programs and evaluating and potentially changing their existing program mix. Growing their senior management team and board, strengthening their fund development capacity, and integrating a robust outcomes management system throughout the organization are cornerstones to accomplishing this organizational transformation.

Investment Rationale

The LAYC is the largest organization serving Latino youth in the District and therefore has a high potential for long-lasting social impact. Lori Kaplan is a proven leader who is considered one of the top non-profit leaders in the region and has the ability to “move mountains.” The board is engaged and eager to be involved in a planning process. Many communities in DC, including its service recipients and their families, the broader Latino community, foundations, local government and corporate communities, support the LAYC. The LAYC also has a demonstrated track record in serving youth effectively with a multiplicity of programs. They have achieved concrete results and become an established fixture for change in its community. Finally, the organization is at a pivotal point in its development. They intend to expand into several other jurisdictions in the region, and a strategic plan and infrastructural support will give the LAYC the road map it needs to grow smartly.



Innovations and New Thinking

Since its partnership with VPP began, the LAYC has shown beginning indicators of organizational transformation and is demonstrating real change in the way it views its operations and its future. An intensive and successful planning process energized the organization and the board while giving the LAYC the concrete data about its current programs and future options it needs to make serious choices. They are thinking differently about the way they recruit and retain senior talent, going so far as to reorganize their senior management team and committing to support new positions and roles. The whole organization is focusing on outcomes, and the outcomes data, as it begins to come in, will be used to make smart choices about current programs and programs that get migrated or adapted in new sites. As they cross jurisdictional boundaries to serve the unmet needs of a significant population in Maryland, they are forming new kinds of partnerships, particularly with the Archdiocese of Greater Washington, but also with community and public leaders. They are learning how to maintain their organizational culture while navigating the sensitivities of new communities and neighborhoods.

Key Accomplishments

The LAYC has established three new centers in Montgomery and Prince George's Counties in Maryland, projected to serve thousands of youth with a select group of its services. Central to this strategic expansion is the unique partnership established with the Archdiocese of Greater Washington, critical ties to county agencies, secured funding streams in the new jurisdictions, and strengthened operations at its headquarters to manage new growth. Other noteworthy accomplishments that contributed to improved capacity and increased effectiveness include:

- **Planning and Focus:** Completed business planning in April 2004, facilitated by Monitor Group, resulting in a well-defined expansion plan for Maryland and the demographic data needed to make strategic choices about service provision
- **Human Capital—Board and Management:**
 - Greatly strengthened senior managing team, integrating Maryland Managing Director, DC Managing Director, Chief Financial Officer, Director of Development, and Learning and Evaluation Specialist.
 - Better defining processes and utilization of staff across sites and charter schools as organization expands.
 - Good board strengthened by addition of strategic members. Advisory board with local expertise and network created for Maryland expansion and coordinates with charter schools.
- **Capitalization/Revenue:** Raised approximately \$2 million for Maryland expansion over one year from multiple sources including local foundations, federal earmarks, public funding, and individual donors. Most notably, leveraged federal appropriations totaling \$950 thousand, up from \$100 thousand in the previous two years. Helped influence a gift of \$1.25 million from the Fernandez Foundation to the Archdiocese partnership.
- **Outcome Assessment:** Extensive new outcomes assessment system designed and beginning to be established for managing 40+ programs under the leadership of full-time Learning and Evaluation Specialist.



■ Leaders

Lori M. Kaplan

Executive Director, Latin American Youth Center



Lori M. Kaplan began working as a volunteer at the Latin American Youth Center (LAYC) in 1979, joined the staff in 1980, and has served as executive director since 1987. She also serves as the executive director of The Next Step

Public Charter School, a public charter school founded by the LAYC in 1996 for teen parents, recent immigrants, and youth who have dropped out of traditional public schools.

In addition to her work at the LAYC, Kaplan serves as treasurer of the board of directors of Youth Radio, an award winning national youth radio and media arts training program based in California, with a DC-based bureau located at the LAYC. She is mayoral appointee to the District of Columbia Workforce Investment Council, and serves on the boards of the Consortium of Child Welfare, Capital Area Assets Building Corporation, Council on Latino Agencies, and Nonprofit Roundtable of Greater Washington. She was a member of the 1991-1992 Leadership Washington class and frequently presents at local and national conferences and serves on advisory boards and steering committees on issues related to youth development, Latino community, and social justice.

Kaplan is the recipient of numerous awards including the 1994 Distinguished Leadership Award from the National Association for Community Leadership, Washingtonian magazine's 1997 Washingtonian of the Year, and the 2001 Lewis Hine Award for Dedicated Service from the National Child Labor Committee. She has a BA degree from Antioch College and a master's degree in education from George Washington University. She is the proud mother of Max and lives with her family in the District of Columbia.

Noel Bravo

Chairman, Board of Directors

Noel Bravo serves as board chairman for the Latin American Youth Center. He currently manages the Policy Matters project at the Center for the Study of Social Policy in Washington, DC. This research effort identifies state policies with demonstrated success in strengthening families, and communicates this research to policymakers and advocates across the country. Prior to working at the Center, Bravo served as a senior advisor to Mayor Anthony Williams in Washington DC, where he led strategic planning and budget formulation for the DC government. He also served as a private sector management consultant. Bravo holds a bachelors degree in public policy from Stanford University and a masters degree in public policy from Harvard University.





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