

Para Los Niños

<https://www.plnwa.org>

AI Generated (GLT Reviewed) Summary

Para Los Niños (PLN) is a grassroots organization dedicated to supporting Latino immigrant and refugee families in South King County, focusing on fostering academic and life success through community involvement. By providing culturally relevant programs that include early learning, academic support, healthcare access, and leadership development, PLN empowers families to advocate for their children's education and well-being. Since its inception in 2003, PLN has positively impacted over 25,000 families, building strong community connections and transforming educational experiences for Latino children.

Q1: What does your organization do?

"Having intergenerational classes reflects our Latin culture of shared, inherited knowledge." -- PLN Executive Director

Para Los Niños (PLN) is a grassroots community organization serving Latino immigrant and refugee families. Our mission is to foster academic and life success for every Latino student through parent and community involvement. From birth and beyond, PLN supports and empowers the entire Latino family through early learning, academic support, summer enrichment, technology access, healthcare, and social justice parent leadership programs. To bolster the education of our children, we lead from the heart, bring the whole family along, center our Spanish language and Latino cultural traditions, and foster community leadership from within. We believe that all Latino children are capable of excellence, and we achieve that goal by building culturally relevant programs upon a foundation of love and respect, supported by a community leadership model that recognizes the talents and skills of each person. Since 2003 PLN has served over 25,000 Latino families in South King County, building enduring community connections and transforming the way the Highline School District works with Latino children and families. Para Los Niños serves ~2,500 Latino immigrant and refugee children and families per year. Here are some recent highlights from our programs:

- **Centering Latino Culture in Our Community's Learning:** Our Aprendamos Juntos family learning program offers a unique educational model that supports simultaneous learning for children and adults and supports parents to learn English and become strong advocates for their children's education. The program supports children to gain academic and social/emotional skills and parents to gain English skills and build skills to navigate local educational systems. Our Early Learning Programs provide families with community resources and support to support healthy development and establish parents as children's first and most important teachers. Our new program Creciendo en Comunidad (Growing in Community) highlights the importance of healthy first relationships by providing developmental, social, and relational support for the Latino family through pregnancy, birth, and infancy. Our integrative youth programs provide young people with opportunities to develop academic, personal, relational, and workforce development skills through the lens of Latin American culture and wisdom. In the next 3-5 years we plan to increase the capacity of our Education Programs serving families in the Highline School District and expand beyond into other areas. Family unity and diversity, distinctly Latino values, are at the core of our multilingual and multicultural learning programs. In June, when we celebrated the graduation of 700 children and adults from across all of our education programs, we took pride in knowing they would apply their learning to advance the wellbeing of their families and our whole community. Throughout the year, whether we were sharing traditions together for Día de Reyes, organizing community performances of Latina American folkloric dancers, teaching South American heritage arts and crafts to kids in our summer programs, or lovingly building Ofrendas (altars) in our Burien office storefront and the community center to remember our ancestors on Día de los Muertos, we infused our education, family engagement, leadership programs and celebrations with Latino cultural pride and joy.
- **Latina Parents in the Lead:** It is almost unimaginable that in 2003, Para Los Niños' founding parent leaders had to campaign the Highline Public Schools to provide basic information in families' native Spanish language. Fast forward 20 years, and as a result of PLN's long history of organizing, leadership development, and civic engagement, graduates of our Leadership Academy sat on the hiring committee for a new Superintendent of Schools and proudly helped hire the

first Latino superintendent in the Highline School District's history! In 2024, PLN supported Latino parents to lead their schools' Parent Teacher Associations, and helped parent leaders fight to rebuild aging and dilapidated school buildings through their seats on the school district's Capital Facilities Advisory Committee. More and more families feel comfortable accessing the school system, solving problems that impact their children, and building relationships with teachers and other school staff. Once a voice alone in the wilderness, PLN can now ensure that Latino families are at the center of critical decisions impacting our schools. Beyond the education system, PLN parent leaders testified in favor of a higher Burien minimum wage, led phone banks to educate and mobilize the Latino community to vote, and helped win transit justice through the adoption of free youth transit passes. We plan on continuing to nurture the many ways that PLN parent leaders use their individual and collective voices to improve systems and policies to support their children's learning, growth, and wellbeing in the City of Burien and beyond.

- Investing in Community Health: The Promotoras de Salud program elevates trusted community leaders to provide culturally aligned, multilingual healthcare resources and access to the diverse community of Latin American immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers in South King County. Our group of trained Promotoras continues to grow, as three more Latina mothers gained Community Health Worker certification in the last year. The Promotoras program takes a very broad view of community health -- we connect people directly with healthcare providers, do public education on disease prevention, provide family wellness tools, normalize mental health needs and elevate resources, and provide support for parents to understand their children's healthy growth and development. We collaborate with Public Health, SeaMar Community Health, Latinx Health Board to provide regular community health, dental, and vaccine clinics specifically for Latin American families. Promotoras take a special focus on the healthcare needs of children and families, connecting them to prenatal care, postpartum support, children's healthcare resources, and specialized support for the needs of youth and young adults. We support parents to become empowered as advocates within healthcare systems to better meet the needs of their families and community. We connect native Latin communities who speak languages other than Spanish to healthcare resources and opportunities in their languages.
- Bridging the Digital Divide: During the COVID-19 pandemic, school districts were shocked to learn that so many immigrant families had neither internet service nor a home computer. At Para Los Niños, we understand that the digital divide is just another racial and economic disparity that the pandemic laid bare. We created our Technology Access Program in direct response to requests from our parent leaders who wanted more tools to not just access information on their children's schooling, but also to send research community resources, send emails, and apply for jobs. In 2024, we ramped up the Technology Access Program to support youth in the Latinx Youth Program to learn the Python coding language and build technology skills for the workforce. In addition to our advanced computer classes, we also added new basic computer classes in which our first lesson is to learn how to turn the computer on.

PLN programs work together to build the collective voice and power of the Latino immigrant community in the region to end educational disparities that result in the academic achievement gap and create a future where our children can thrive. Family engagement is a central principle and core value within all our work and each of our programs creates opportunities for parents to gain the skills, confidence, and community support they need to become strong advocates for their children and community. All together, PLN programs uplift young Latino learners and increase Latino parents' ability to be strong advocates for their children's education, to support their young children's development, positive identity, self-esteem, cultural pride, and the growth of the entire family.

Q2: What communities does your organization serve and how does your staff, leadership, advisors and board reflect these communities?

"The biggest challenge that I have had to overcome in this country, apart from the language, is having left my relatives in Mexico and starting a new life from scratch. What motivates me the most to improve myself are my children. What I would like to change is the inequality in terms of educational, health and employment opportunities for the Latino community. This is why I am a part of Para Los Niños." -- PLN Parent Leader

Para Los Niños has built deep relationships of trust with the Latino immigrant community in South King County because we operate as a multilingual and multicultural organization that uplifts our community's language, culture, and heritage. We serve the growing community of Latino immigrant and refugee families from Mexico, Central, and South America that live in South King County, with concentrations in the Highline Public Schools area (Burien, SeaTac, Des Moines, Normandy Park). Latino families face barriers related to race, immigration status, income level, and gender. Trust in institutions is low and often the

information provided to Latino communities lacks the appropriate cultural lens to adequately reach our community. Magnified disparities exist for women, single parents, native Latin American communities, LGBTQ people, those with disabilities, and the undocumented.

Several factors contribute to Latino families' struggles: low English literacy, coupled with lack of knowledge about the local resources and systems, prevent many children and families from getting the access to resources they need. Schools, social agencies, and childcare providers are often not equipped to outreach to and design culturally relevant programs for Latino children and families. Lack of culturally relevant and accessible academic support results in negative outcomes later in life with academics, behavior, and social emotional learning. Our solution is to provide culturally celebratory programming for children and youth and educate Latino families in their entirety so that together we may support students' academic success, from birth on.

The need for each of PLN's programs was identified by deep community engagement with Latino families themselves through surveys, parent leadership classes, family summits, and one-on-one interviews. We then engaged Latino parents and youth to co-design each program in collaboration with community partners and stakeholders. PLN is a grassroots organization with staff and board whose leadership emerged to address critical needs in our own immigrant families and communities. We support our families to retain a strong hold on our Latino culture; our shared language and cultural experience makes that completely organic for staff. PLN's staff are seasoned educators and community leaders who have worked in both community and formal educational settings. Combined, we have more than 80 years' experience as teachers, facilitators, community advocates, and popular educators. In order to implement Para Los Niños' value of being a completely multilingual and multicultural organization that integrates Latin American culture throughout our organization, we intentionally recruit and develop leaders who are of, by and for our Latino immigrant community. PLN's service model says that we must foster deep relationships with and inspire ownership by the community we serve.

The strong wave of anti-immigrant sentiment targeting Latinos in the US and the resulting deportations and family separations are significantly impacting Latino families in the areas. Both these policies and the sentiments behind them create tremendous insecurity for the Latino community as a whole, especially families with children. In this fraught time, PLN remains committed to providing culturally-aligned space to preserve the collective safety and dignity of the Latino community in the area. We work to be a welcoming open door for all families seeking support, assistance, community, and learning opportunities.

Q3: How is your organization addressing root causes of inequities to drive change?

"The biggest challenge I have ever had to overcome has been the fear of the culture and the language, and to a certain point, fear of discrimination for being a Latin woman. PLN helps me to be involved as a leader in my community to prove that the Latin community does count and deserves a place in this country." -- PLN Leadership Academy Graduate

PLN's work is deeply rooted in Latin American cultural values to work for equity and justice, as we understand that uplifting children and families uplifts the entire community. The social justice values at work in our programming include:

- **Relationships First:** We continue to forefront deep and authentic relationship building in all our programming with children, youth, and adults alike, ensuring that PLN is a safe and welcoming place for all in need of support and connection. Relationships matter first and foremost in our work, which is community informed and supported at every level. We make our programming dynamic, relevant, fun, and accessible for children and families.
- **Leadership Development & Political Education:** PLN is an organization led and founded by the Latino immigrant community. Community feedback guides and directs all our work. Parent engagement is an organizational value built into every one of our programs, supporting parents to become confident, resourced, empowered leaders and advocates for their children's educations, both at home and within the school system. We support parents to understand the systems they participate in, from school to healthcare and government, so they can learn the power of their stories to make impacts.
- **Community Responsiveness & Accessibility:** Providing multilingual programming and resources has been a central priority for PLN to engage families from Indigenous Latin American communities who are new to the U.S. We stay deeply connected with families to respond to changing needs as they emerge and evolve our programming accordingly. We also understand the need to provide resources and support surrounding the issues that continue to impact our families most, including housing, employment, health, and mental health.

- Language access: All PLN staff are bilingual in Spanish and English, and we also offer services for children and families from Indigenous Latin American communities who speak Mixteco, Zapoteco, Purepecha, Lenguaje de la lluvia, and Maya/Quiche. Leaders from within these Indigenous communities in turn support our outreach to more from their communities, as these languages are so spoken so rarely, it is not possible to find professional interpreters or even to become certified as an interpreter for them. There are many languages spoken within our community even beyond those listed, and we provide services through in person interpretation and language lines as needed and possible.
- Cultural Celebration: All our programming is designed to uplift Latin American language and culture to support our cultural pride and diversity as Latinos.
- Solidarity: Our work takes a broad lens on interconnected racial and social justice values, identifying and taking action in support of other communities impacted by overlapping issues.
- Individual & Collective Transformation: Many children and even adults enter our programs very shy and reluctant to speak up in classes. PLN programs provide participants with tools to build self confidence, in a warm and nurturing environment that supports participants to connect well with each other. Over time, people express willingness and comfort to participate fully in the programming, engage well with peers, and grow in self-confidence, communication, and leadership. Social emotional skills development is core learning for our children, as the strongest leaders are both compassionate and community-connected.
- Whole Family Support & Accessibility: PLN provides programming for both children and adults together or simultaneously, ensuring the entire family can participate. We prioritize the accessibility of our programs for families facing multiple ongoing barriers to participation, and seek to both meet practical needs and build relational connections, warmth, and care.

Para Los Niños is a trusted community resource created by and for Latino parents that understands the complex needs of this community and works to build not just community safety, but also the power and voice we need to collectively address social and racial justice. Our goal at PLN is to have impact on several levels: first with individual children, parents, and families; with the Latino community as a whole; within educational and healthcare institutions around our region; and on a broad scale where we work to close the achievement gap and increase equity for every Latino family. PLN's short-term goals are to:

- Increase the academic achievement of Latino children and youth.
- Build Latino children's self-esteem by increasing their knowledge of, pride in, and connection to their language and cultural heritage through art, music, dance, and food.
- Equip Latino parents with the skills, knowledge, and confidence to become confident first teachers and strong advocates for their children's education.
- Increase the cultural competency of local educational institutions and transform them into places that are inclusive of and successful at serving our Latino immigrant community.

Resulting in long-term gains to:

- Lessen the academic achievement gap for Latino children and increase their academic success by supporting and expanding learning programs designed by and for Latino families.
- Develop strong community leadership where we can combine our individual skills and talents to build strong, vibrant communities.
- Build a community of empowered Latino families in South King County and responsive, culturally aware institutions that support all Latino families to thrive.

Q4: How would this award impact your organization and the communities served?

"I got to know PLN when I was in the second grade and enrolled in the Aprendamos Juntos program. While my parents attended English classes, the teachers and assistants helped me with my homework. Now I support other children in this same program and participate in the Latinx Youth program. PLN has also had a great impact specifically on my family, as well as on other families, so it is important to support the organization to continue supporting the community." -- Latinx Youth Program Participant

Investment and partnership from Impact 100 would come at a critical time for our organization, as we work to secure our home base. Para Los Niños offers our intergenerational programming out of an office in down Burien, one of central gathering places for the Latino immigrant and refugee communities in the Highline Public Schools area. Before the pandemic, we rented a much

smaller office space at a subsidized rate, but the building was shut down due to repairs and we were forced to move. The commercial space we are in currently is much larger with a better location, but also seven times the cost of our previous building (over \$6,000/month). Knowing we needed a stable location so that we can continue to be an anchor for the community as we face new and deepening social and political challenges, we made an organizational decision to prioritize purchasing the space.

The new building also has multiple significant repair and upgrade needs that have compounded over time. We are prioritizing safety, accessibility, and energy efficiency in order to make our space a comfortable, climate resilient, and culturally celebratory space to be accessed by the Latino immigrant community in the area. We will be utilizing funds from this grant to make upgrades and repairs to the roof, HVAC system, interior and exterior repairs, painting, and to insulate the attic, improve building accessibility and energy efficiency, and to improve the electrical and plumbing systems. These repairs are essential to us making full use of the space as an early learning center for the Latino community with multigenerational programs to serve the whole family. This building is an investment in the long-term future of Para Los Niños, and the Latino immigrant community in South King County.

The Para Los Niños office is a safe haven for families from the Latino community to gather to support and help each other. As a community we are incredibly resourceful and strongly interconnected, and those strengths are interwoven into our cultural identity and celebrated in our physical space. Responsiveness has been key for us, as our families care deeply about supporting each other through difficulty. As a community, we genuinely care for each other and are hungry to learn how to best support our kids and each other in times of need. A strongly interconnected network of friends and allies, we come together to respond to each other's needs directly as they arise. We raise funds, food, and other critical needs for families in crisis, facing separation or deportation. Our community space is a central part of what makes that possible, and we would welcome the opportunity to partner with the community-minded donors of Impact 100 to make this happen.

Q5: Does your organization partner (or plan to partner) with other organizations?

"Para Los Niños eliminates the barriers to be able to occupy a place in [leadership] spaces and allows us to offer our voice and share from our own experiences." -- Leadership Academy Graduate

PLN has many strong community partners who collaborate with us to make our programs successful and share our collective vision for uplifting the voice and power of the Latino community, especially our young people. Our partnerships enable us to build our own skills and resources to better serve children and families, cross-pollinate ideas, perform better outreach, and collaborate to meet the diverse needs of our community. We have a long history of collaboration with the Highline School District and Highline Community College to center and meet the needs of Latino immigrant children and families, resulting in a steady increase in bilingual educational resources and Latino parent representation. We have worked with Puentes to provide mental health workshops and art therapy and coping skills tools for our youth. We have strong partnerships with the Department of Health, Latinx Health Board, King County Public Health, Latinos Promoting Good Health, SW Youth and Family Services, Highline Heritage Museum, Exchange Club, Discovering Burien, Omega Up, and the White Center Community Development Association to develop information and coordinate outreach strategies to best reach the Latino community. Youth Internship Program partners include the Gates Foundation, Highline College, Entre Hermanos, Museum of Flight, and Colectiva Legal. Youth programming also collaborates with the City of Burien to plant trees and put up Dia de los Muertos altars in the community center, the Burien library to host chess club events, U Power to provide diverse sports opportunities, the DEA for anti-drug workshops, Chase Bank for financial management tools, and Padrino entrepreneurship and business development.

We have found that the more deeply we invest in Latino families, the more impact our work has on a community level and the stronger foundation children build for future academic, social, emotional, and physical wellbeing over the long term. We have a strong network of supporters who are dedicated to the success of this work, from board members to program volunteers, many of whom are young people who have grown up in our programs. We also have strong support from the community at large who understand the critical role PLN plays in supporting Latino immigrant children and families. PLN's leadership and model developed directly out of the cultural context and needs of the Latino community in King County, and make our organization uniquely qualified to lead work to help parents forge a path for our Latino youth to find the academic and life success they, and we all, deserve.

Q6: Is there anything you'd like to tell us that we haven't asked?

“What I have found in Para Los Niños is support. In the organization I have studied English, learned computers, and done the Leadership Academy, which has helped me a lot. I want to thank everyone who supports PLN since that gives us more opportunities to study and overcome obstacles.” -- Parent Leader

The families we work with at PLN have a hand in shaping our programming, keeping us relevant to community needs as they occur. PLN programs run on feedback from our participants, young people included, and we build decision making and leadership opportunities throughout the program. We do regular evaluation and feedback conversations with youth and their parents to ensure they are being fully engaged and having their needs met in the program. Youth decide which sports and other activities they want to learn. Interns select their own areas of career interest to explore, and each take a different track according to their preference: advocacy, services, organizing, civil service, voter engagement, and more.

The need for each of PLN's programs was identified by deep community engagement with Latino families themselves through surveys, parent leadership classes, family summits, and one-on-one interviews. We then engaged Latino parents and youth to co-design each program in collaboration with community partners and stakeholders. Since our programs are open and welcoming to all Latino children of various levels of academic and English language proficiency, we utilize common educational standards (including Highline Public Schools data) but primarily evaluate student progress based on each student's individual needs and specialized learning trajectory. We ask for direct feedback from families during programming, and staff reach out to parents through one-on-ones at the program site, phone calls, and face-to-face meetings. We conduct year-end program evaluations by sending written surveys in Spanish and English to parents. We tabulate and analyze the results and use them as a jumping off point for intensive staff evaluation and plan for program improvement. PLN staff meet frequently to update curriculum, brainstorm challenges, and revise program logistics to meet student and parent needs.

Reviewer Notes

How does this organization build community power?

-

How does this organization build individual capacity?

-

How is this organization altering systemic structures and behaviors

-

Other Notes

-

Your Rating

Unreviewed

Update Notes

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