



LEHIGH VALLEY

**2023-2024
ANNUAL REPORT**



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thank you

Letter from the President

A Mis Amigos,

Over the past year, the Hispanic Center has made significant strides in expanding its capacity, allowing us to serve more people and receive national recognition. Despite the ongoing challenges facing our community, including increasing food insecurity, housing instability, and limited job growth opportunities, we have improved efficiency, program success, and community trust.



We celebrated a record-breaking Fiesta: Dominican Republic gala which was made possible through the support of our partners and friends. We are especially proud to announce that our Linguistic and Cultural Workforce Development Center, a joint venture with St. Luke's University Health Network, launched this past year. I also want to extend deep appreciation to our former Executive Director, Victoria Montero, whose leadership during her five years as Executive Director was instrumental in securing record funding and strengthening our programs.

This year marked an exciting transition to our new Executive Director, Raymond Santiago. Our Board of Directors look forward to working with Raymond and the Hispanic Center staff as we continue empowering people to become more self-sufficient. Some more good news, our renovation of our administration building was completed and fully furnished by December 2023. This newly renovated wing houses our staff and the newly created computer lab.

As we continue to address the community's evolving needs, we remain committed to building a more resilient, socially, and economically just community.

Thank you for your ongoing support. Together, we can continue to drive meaningful change in our community.

A cursive signature of Adrienne McNeil in black ink.

Adrienne McNeil
President, Board of Directors

Letter from the Executive Director

Mi Gente,

As the Executive Director of the Hispanic Center Lehigh Valley, I am both humbled and grateful for the opportunity to lead this incredible organization. Every day, I witness firsthand the positive impact we have on our community. Our mission is deeply rooted in service, and it is through the collective efforts of our staff, volunteers, and generous supporters like you that we can continue to make a difference in the lives of those who need us most. Your dedication fuels our work, and I am truly thankful for your ongoing partnership.



This past year, our Basilio Huertas Senior Center has continued to be a place of joy, connection, and support for older adults in our community, ensuring that they stay engaged, healthy, and valued. Our Food Pantry has provided essential nourishment to countless families, and our Social Services program has offered critical assistance to individuals navigating complex challenges. We strive to meet people where they are, offering a hand up and a path forward, no matter the obstacles they face.

In addition, the Linguistic and Cultural Workforce Development Center has empowered individuals with the tools and resources they need to secure employment and build a better future. At the heart of all our work is a commitment to uplifting our community and ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to thrive. I am deeply honored to be a part of this journey, and I look forward to the continued progress we will make together in the coming year.

Sincerely,

A cursive signature of Raymond Santiago in black ink.

Raymond Santiago
Executive Director

OUR IMPACT

742

HOUSEHOLDS SERVED
including 3,031 people
impacted through our
food pantry

72

SENIORS

participating in socialization,
educational, enrichment,
and entertainment
activities

**Social Service
Program served
the community through**

382

**VISITS
TO OUR CENTER**

548

students
supported
by our
back-to-school
event

15,000+

MEALS WERE SERVED,
ensuring our seniors
had access to
nutritious meals
throughout
the year

194,456

POUNDS OF FOOD
distributed to families
in need

NEARLY

**150,000
PEOPLE REACHED**

through a comprehensive
bilingual social media campaign,
radio segments, and billboard
campaign providing vaccine
education and advocacy



NATIONAL HISPANIC HERITAGE

ABOUT US

Since being founded in 1968, Hispanic Center Lehigh Valley (HCLV) has worked to empower low-income individuals living in South Bethlehem and throughout Northampton County, Pennsylvania.

Our mission is to improve the quality of lives of families (Hispanic and non-Hispanic) by empowering them to become more self-sufficient, while promoting an intercultural understanding in the Lehigh Valley.

At HCLV, we believe in a community that embraces economic opportunity for all and sees its cultural diversity as a foundation for building a stronger society and a more vibrant economy. We also believe at the heart of change is the individual's desire and willingness to pursue a path toward their own independence and self-sufficiency.



HCLV RESPONSE TO COVID-19

HCLV has built on efforts from fiscal year 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 to address pandemic-related disparities among people of color and low-income communities, focusing on increasing vaccine education and uptake. In fiscal year 2023-2024, HCLV secured a third year of CDC Foundation funding through the Partnering for Vaccine Equity grant to enhance vaccination outreach and reduce health inequities. This funding strengthened partnerships with local health bureaus, pharmacies, and healthcare providers, enabling culturally and linguistically relevant communication strategies via television, radio, social media, postcards, and a prominent billboard campaign. HCLV addressed challenges like vaccine hesitancy and misinformation by hosting a town hall on WFMZ featuring healthcare experts and hosted by La Mega's Victor Martinez. Strong collaborations, especially with St. Luke's University Health Network and Star Community Health, contributed significantly to HCLV's success, particularly in engaging the community through social media and radio outreach.





BASILIO HUERTAS SENIOR CENTER

The Basilio Huertas Senior Center at Hispanic Center Lehigh Valley (HCLV) promotes healthy aging through culturally responsive support and services, focusing on the unique needs of our community's seniors. The program is structured around three main components: bilingual case management, food access and nutrition, and socialization and recreation—ensuring comprehensive care for our aging population.

In the 2023-2024 fiscal year, the Basilio Huertas Senior Center served 72 seniors, aged 60 and older, offering them not only vital services but also a welcoming space to connect with their peers. Improved morale, increased socialization, and enhanced mental health have become defining characteristics of the program. For many of our seniors, the Senior Center is their primary means of accessing these activities and supports.

Key Accomplishments:

■ **Meals Provided:** Over 15,000 breakfasts and lunches were served, ensuring our seniors had access to nutritious meals throughout the year.

Services and Highlights:

■ **Bilingual Case Management:** Assistance with navigating complex health and human services, including applying for housing, SNAP benefits, bill and rent payments, and medication management.

■ **Cultural & Holiday Celebrations:** Festive events celebrating holidays and cultural heritage days, fostering a sense of belonging and community.

■ **Physical Activity:** Zumba classes and other activities designed to promote movement and overall physical well-being.

■ **Partnerships & Resources:** Informational sessions with healthcare providers, local pharmacies, and organizations offering seniors access to services and programs tailored to their needs.

Engagement & Activities:

■ 36 social events organized, including games like bingo and dominoes that foster camaraderie and community.

■ 126 educational activities, helping seniors stay informed about health, wellness, and navigating services.

■ 33 health screenings conducted in partnership with local healthcare providers, such as St. Luke's University Health Network.

■ **Health Services:** Wellness Fairs and visits from St. Luke's School of Nursing offered critical services, including blood glucose testing, blood pressure monitoring, BMI calculations, and vaccination clinics.

■ **Workshops:** AmeriHealth Caritas provided valuable workshops on aging in place and overall wellness, ensuring that our seniors have the tools they need to thrive at home.

The Basilio Huertas Senior Center continues to be a lifeline for many in our community, ensuring seniors not only have access to essential services but also a vibrant, supportive environment. In addition to our regular offerings, this past year, our senior clients designed and launched "Talento Local," a program aimed at bridging cultural and generational barriers. Through this initiative, they share the richness of Hispanic/Latino culture via performances that highlight distinctive choreography, music, dance, food, language, and costumes—fostering a deeper connection between seniors and the broader community.





FOOD PANTRY

As the cost of living—including food prices—continues to rise, the rate of food insecurity has escalated throughout Northampton County, particularly in HCLV's target areas of Southside Bethlehem and the Marvine/Pembroke neighborhood. Since early 2020, food price inflation has steadily increased. According to the USDA Economic Research Service, food prices rose by 9.9% in 2022, marking the fastest rise since 1979. Specifically, food-at-home prices increased by 11.4%, while food-away-from-home prices rose by 7.7%.

In 2022, Feeding America reported that 10.7% of Northampton County faced food insecurity, with a 14.8% child food insecurity rate. While county-level data reflects the overall need, indicators such as the concentration of low-income families suggest the food insecurity rate in HCLV's target areas (Census Tracts 105, 109, 110, 112, and 113) is likely much higher.

During the fiscal year 2023-2024, HCLV's food pantry served 742 households, including 413 first-time visits, resulting in a total of 3,031 encounters and distributing 194,456 pounds of food to families in need. This represents a 46% increase in food distributed compared to the previous year's total of 133,158 pounds, and nearly double the number of households and encounters seen last year.

Key Accomplishments:

■ **Partnerships and Fresh Food Distribution:** Thanks to ongoing partnerships with Sam's Club and Second Harvest Food Bank, the pantry maintained a high level of fresh food distribution, including fruits, vegetables, dairy, and meats. Most canned goods are sourced from Second Harvest, while fresh produce and proteins are provided by Sam's Club.

■ **Volunteer Support:** A total of 499 volunteers contributed 3,740.12 hours of service, valued at \$118,935.82. These volunteers, ranging from high school students and college interns to retirees and corporate partners, played a crucial role in sorting food, cleaning, and ensuring smooth pantry operations.

■ **Client Satisfaction:** HCLV's food pantry is recognized for its exemplary structure, offering culturally appropriate food items, essential household goods, and baby products—resources that are often unavailable at other food pantries. Clients consistently express appreciation for the pantry's organized appointment system, cleanliness, and the wide variety of items offered. As food insecurity continues to challenge families, the Food Pantry remains a vital resource, providing not just food but also dignity and culturally relevant support to those in need.



SOCIAL SERVICE PROGRAM

Staff continue to provide broad, bilingual case management that focuses on personal growth and financial independence, such as offering basic navigational services, including translation, interpretation, and correspondence with public assistance. Referrals are made to WIC for women and children's nutrition and to New Bethany Ministries for housing assistance. During fiscal year 2023-2024, the Social Service Program served clients through a total of 382 visits and assisted 141 households.

Staff have witnessed a drastic increase in food and housing insecurity, including evictions, lack of affordability, limited available housing, and poor-quality housing. In addition, the community faces a shortage of quality employment opportunities, which has further impacted South Bethlehem residents.

HCLV's Social Service Program is transitioning toward a more evidence-based model, which will include formalizing processes and organizing the program into four vital components to better meet the varying degrees of client needs and more clearly communicate the continuum of services provided. Over the next few months, the Social Service Program will restructure to incorporate the following elements:

1. Navigation Assistance
2. Referral Services
3. Wraparound Case Management
4. Employment Services



CLIENT SUCCESS STORY:

One young mother with a 9-month-old baby contacted HCLV seeking assistance with her utilities. The household, supported by a single income due to high daycare costs, was struggling to keep up with bills. The mother had received a shut-off notice with only 10 days to resolve the issue. HCLV staff immediately took action, applying for the OnTrack Program on her behalf and contacting them directly to expedite the application process. Within days, her application was approved, and the shut-off notice was halted. Her new OnTrack payment would be only \$20 per month—a financial relief that made it possible to keep the power on for her family. This support not only helped her maintain essential services but also alleviated a significant source of stress.

As the mother shared

“ If it wouldn't have been for the Social Services Coordinator, thanks to HCLV our family would not have power and I wouldn't have known what to do. ”



Linguistic and Cultural Workforce Development Center



In partnership with St. Luke's University Health Network, The Linguistic and Cultural Workforce Development Center (WDC) was launched at Hispanic Center Lehigh Valley and St. Luke's Sacred Heart Campus thanks to a \$450,000 grant from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania supported by former U.S. Senator Patrick Brown. During its first year, the WDC aids individuals at any stage of their career path to access employment opportunities. The model employs evidence-based practices to promote cultural competency, support linguistic development, provide education and training, and provide equitable employment opportunities. The WDC collaborated with partners including Northampton Community College, Lehigh Carbon Community College, and The Literacy Center. Workforce Board Lehigh Valley also referred and connected clients as needed. Participants worked with bilingual (Spanish and English) program coordinators to identify career goals and barriers to employment, following which they created individualized action plans to complete education including English as a Second Language (ESL) courses and/or skill-based trainings through partner organizations to achieve credentials for high-priority occupations. Simultaneously, participants received bilingual case management services to address employment barriers. The WDC also provided employability skills training to participants to increase and strengthen job-seeking and job-keeping abilities.

Thanks to support from U.S. Senator Bob Casey (D-PA) through the Community Project requests, the Linguistic and Cultural Workforce Development Center was awarded \$350,000 for fiscal year 2025.

Allentown Center

During FY24, the Allentown Center engaged a total of 269 individuals. Of these clients, 68% enrolled in English as a Second Language (ESL) classes in partnership with The Literacy Center, skill-based trainings with Lehigh Carbon Community College and/or received employment services.

Bethlehem Center

During FY24, the Bethlehem Center engaged 163 individuals of which 73.6% enrolled in ESL classes or skill-based trainings with Northampton Community College and/or received employment services.



SUCCESS STORY



As with many immigrant families, the Matias moved from Guatemala to the United States seeking an opportunity to leave the hardships of their home country. Though Rita Matias was born and raised in Lanham, Maryland, Spanish was her first language because her parents wanted her to know the importance of preserving their culture. Although education was very important for the Matias, Rita did not attend college as she needed to financially support her family. Rita knew she wanted a career in healthcare after graduating from Freedom High School in 2019, yet the financial struggles kept her from enrolling in college. Her dream of becoming a healthcare professional became seemingly impossible when she learned about her pregnancy.

Becoming a mother at such a young age was life-changing for Rita, but thanks to the Nurse Family Partnership (NFP) program through the VNA of St. Luke's, Rita received education and advice on how to take care of her new baby, as well as herself. NFP is a voluntary, evidence-based home visitation program in which Registered Nurses with specialized education visit low-income, at-risk mothers from early in pregnancy through the first two years of the child's life.

Rita and her husband decided she would become a stay-at-home mother when they learned about her pregnancy. Knowing that providing for her family was a priority and pursuing a career in healthcare would give her financial stability, Rita asked her NFP Registered Nurse what to do. Rita's nurse encouraged her to enroll in the Linguistic and Cultural Workforce Development Center's Phlebotomy class through a partnership with Northampton Community College (NCC).

During Rita's interview with program staff, she was skeptical about completing the class in just three months. "I thought it was a long time. I did not know how I was going to take care of my kids while working and going to school. But everyone was so supportive, especially my husband," Rita said. She is thankful of her NFP Nurse, program staff, and NCC's instructors.

Rita successfully completed the Phlebotomy Technician Program at NCC and is now a certified Phlebotomist working at St. Luke's University Health Network in Easton, PA. She aspires to serve as a resource for her peers and support her family while working towards her goal of becoming a nurse.





FOWLER COMMUNITY WELLNESS CENTER

Since opening in June 2018, the Fowler Community Wellness Center has provided space for various community agencies that deliver integrate social services and physical/healthcare services to low- to moderate-income individuals and families. The co-location of various services allows for efficiency and expands access to help improve the self-sufficiency and quality of life for those we serve.

In addition to the Social Service Program, the Fowler Community Wellness Center houses:

WOMEN, INFANTS AND CHILDREN (WIC): EARLY CHILDHOOD & MATERNAL HEALTH

Located within HCLV's Fowler Community Wellness Center, hosts Bethlehem's only WIC office. The WIC program provides essential support to low-income families, including pregnant women, new caregivers, and children up to age five. It offers personalized nutritional services from conception through early childhood. Maternal and Family Health Services (MFHS) now operates the WIC program while continuing as a tenant at the Fowler Community Wellness Center. The program has seen a steady increase in participation, averaging 1,670 appointments per month for benefits distribution and totaling 20,036 appointments during the past fiscal year.

ST. LUKE'S H.O.P.E. (HEALTH, OUTREACH, PREVENTION, AND EDUCATION) CLINIC PROGRAM

St. Luke's H.O.P.E. (Health, Outreach, Prevention, and Education) Clinic offers comprehensive services, including clinical care, case management, and prevention programs, for individuals who are HIV-positive or at high risk of contracting HIV/AIDS. Supported by federal funding through the Ryan White Act, the clinic focuses on maintaining viral load suppression, reducing stigma, and addressing socio-economic challenges and chronic health conditions. During the 2023-2024 fiscal year, the H.O.P.E. Bethlehem clinic recorded the following patient encounters: **246** in HIV care, **209** in primary care, **246** in nutrition services, **243** in behavioral health, **53** in pastoral care, **517** in medical case management, and **117** in housing. Additionally, many medical case management patients received essential support such as housing assistance, health insurance premium aid, transportation, oral healthcare, utility payment assistance, and Meals on Wheels. The clinic also provided emergency food and cooking supply boxes, gift cards, hotel stays, support groups, and educational classes.

HISPANIC CENTER LEHIGH VALLEY

Fiesta

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

2024

HCLV's Annual Fiesta was held on Friday, May 17, at Wind Creek's Foundry Ballroom. HCLV honored the culture of the Dominican Republic through a night of Latin music, food, dancing, a silent auction, awards, and more.

This year's event honored the following partners for their outstanding work on behalf of HCLV:

1. Beall Fowler
2. PPL Corporation
3. Irene Torres
4. PA State Trooper Andre Made

This year's Fiesta raised a record \$108,000 in sponsorships and ticket sales. These funds were used for operations to continue bringing advocacy, education, resources, and care to our community. HCLV kindly thanks all donors throughout the year, including at Fiesta, for your support and contribution.





BACK TO SCHOOL GIVEAWAY

HCLV's Back-to-School Event has become a vital annual initiative that prepares students for a successful school year. This year, the event was held on Monday, August 19, 2024, and it continued to grow and impact, serving hundreds of local children and families.

During the 2024 Back-to-School Event, HCLV served a total of 170 households, providing 378 children with backpacks and essential school supplies. Out of those children, 60 also received haircuts from local barbers, ensuring they were prepared and confident for the first day of school. In total, the event made a positive impact on 548 individuals within our community.

Thanks to the generosity of multiple community partners we were able to distribute school supplies and offer various services, including:

- Free haircuts, ensuring students were ready to return to school with confidence.
- Live music and entertainment, creating a festive and welcoming environment.
- Food distribution, ensuring families had access to necessary groceries.
- Face painting and fun activities that engaged children and fostered a sense of excitement for the new school year.

The event was a true community effort, with volunteers, local businesses, and organizations coming together to support students and their families. Many expressed deep gratitude for the resources and services provided, which helped ease the financial burden of preparing for the school year. Looking ahead, HCLV is committed to expanding the reach of the Back-to-School Event to ensure that even more children can begin the school year with the supplies, confidence, and support they need to thrive academically and socially.



The event
made a
POSITIVE IMPACT
on
548
INDIVIDUALS
within our
community



STAFF SPOTLIGHT



LIZZETTE MELENDEZ

Born in Jersey City and raised in South Bethlehem for the last 51 years, Lizzette Melendez has always drawn inspiration from her upbringing and the community around her. Growing up in a family where her father was a retired Bethlehem Steel worker and her mother a “domestic goddess,” who dedicated her time to nurturing the family, Lizzette learned the values of hard work and commitment early on. After graduating from Freedom High School in 1984 and Allentown Business School in 1986, she spent her formative years on Mechanic Street, where her parents instilled in her a strong work ethic and the importance of giving back.

Lizzette has been a vital part of HCLV for two and a half years, beginning her journey as the Administrative Coordinator. Her dedication and leadership skills quickly led to promotions first to Operations Coordinator and then to Operations Manager within her first year. Lizzette has always had a profound desire to help

others, especially those in her neighborhood. She takes pride in her role, understanding that her work directly impacts the lives of the community members she serves.

As Operations Manager, Lizzette oversees all departments, ensuring that everything runs smoothly and that financial needs are met. She considers herself a “jack of all trades,” always ready to step in and support her colleagues wherever needed. Her adaptability and problem-solving skills make her an invaluable asset to the organization. What Lizzette loves most about her job is the respect and admiration she receives from her seniors, which fosters a supportive environment and motivates her to continuously strive for excellence.

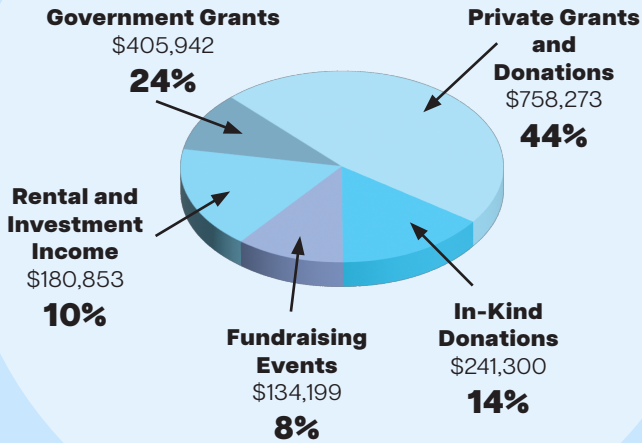
A particularly memorable moment for Lizzette has been her ability to connect with seniors who aren’t close to their children. Many of the seniors served by HCLV live independently and face feelings of isolation. Lizzette genuinely connects with them on a personal level, providing companionship and understanding. These connections mean the world to the seniors, helping to alleviate their loneliness and enrich their lives. Through her efforts, Lizzette exemplifies the heart and soul of HCLV, making a significant difference in the lives of those she serves.



FINANCIAL REPORT

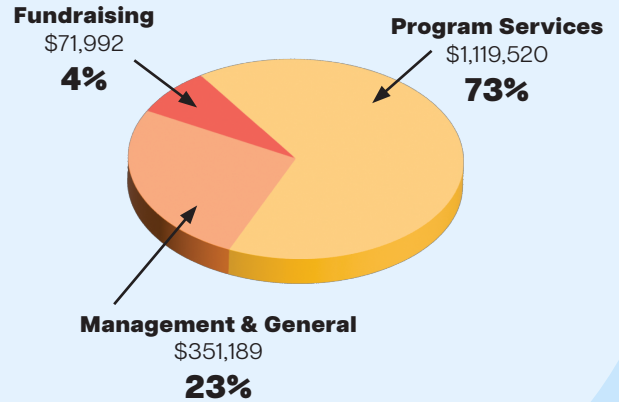
Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 2024

REVENUE



Total Revenue: \$1,720,567

EXPENSES



Total Expenses: \$1,542,701

gracias
thank you

We hope this report highlights the many accomplishments of HCLV this past year and displays the passion and dedication the agency has for enhancing our programs and services to best assist the Hispanic/Latino community.

On behalf of the Board of Directors and staff, we extend our sincere gratitude and appreciation for the trust imparted on us by the community. Without this rapport, the agency's programming and services would be less than impactful, as we look to the community to inform the services provided.

As HCLV's new Executive Director, Raymond Santiago, leads us into the upcoming fiscal year. We look forward to continuing the agency's mission and vision as we remain committed to the community we serve, above all else.



LEHIGH VALLEY

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www.hclv.org



If you would like to support Hispanic Center Lehigh Valley, please consider an annual contribution and/or volunteering the time of yourself, a group, or company. For instance, HCLV's food pantry is looking to increase the number of food drives conducted by community partners. For more information on how you can support the Hispanic Center, please visit our website, www.hclv.org/donate.