Voices of Little Village: Welcoming New Neighbors and Changing Communities

Welcoming Neighborhood Listening Initiative:
2023-2024 Report for Enlace Chicago

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BECOME
Transforming Our Reality

ENLACE
CHICAGO

Gratitude

We thank the Enlace Chicago Community Evaluation Team (CET). Without their courageous efforts in their own community, this project would not have been possible.

- Gueiza Chávez
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- Dulce Ramírez
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- Luisa Román

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Introduction

> **"I've lived here a long time and grew up in the area. People get old, people move on and leave the neighborhood. Everything changes."**

On August 31, 2022, the first bus carrying people seeking asylum (new neighbors/new residents) in the United States arrived from Texas to Union Station.[1] Since then, over 38,000 mainly Venezuelans have arrived in the Chicago area. As a sanctuary city within a sanctuary state, many political leaders, community organizations, and residents have expressed welcome and pooled funding and resources to provide housing, clothing, food, and other resources. Little Village, a neighborhood with a historical Mexican identity and Spanish as its primary language, has been a main placement destination for new residents. Shelter sites have been developed in Little Village, including the 10th District Police Station, Piotrowski Park, and the former CVS as part of Chicago's asylum seeker shelter system. New residents are also being sheltered in other neighborhoods across the city and in a few suburbs.

In Little Village, as well as in other communities in Chicago, tensions have risen between established and new residents.[2] Several factors contribute to these tensions, such as differences in cultural norms and social mores, unknowingly wearing clothing with gang affiliation, increased population density, competition for employment and disparate access to work permits, lack of stable housing, bigger classroom sizes, and the cancellation of recreation programs at Piotrowski Park during its usage as a temporary respite shelter. In some instances, this has led to outbursts of violence.[3] As seen in organizational and governmental responses across Chicago and the state at large, providing appropriate

support either in terms of basic safety net resources or immigration aid – or both – has proven challenging.

Enlace Chicago, one of the primary community organizations and service providers in Little Village, offers a variety of services and programs to long-term and newly arriving community residents. Each of its four main program areas – Education, Health, Immigration, and Violence Intervention – has been impacted by the sharp increase in need with the arrival of new residents and the enduring resource scarcity for long-term community members.

ENLACE CHICAGO

Enlace Chicago convenes, organizes, and builds the capacity of Little Village stakeholders to confront systemic inequities and barriers to economic and social access.

Enlace Chicago sought to understand the impact of newly arriving people on the community through the perspective of current residents. This led to a partnership with BECOME to research and measure community responses to the arrival and integration of mostly non-Mexican asylum seekers and others seeking refuge to the Little Village neighborhood. This Welcoming Neighborhood Listening Initiative (WNLI) sought to create transformative solutions and ongoing innovation driven by Little Village community residents.

Community-based organizations all use various methods and strategies to engage with their constituencies, including visioning and listening sessions, outreach, door knocking, *cafecitos*, and other community meetings. However, a formalized process to involve community members by doing in-depth interviews with their own networks is rare. The WNLI provides a replicable model to ensure that the information shared with partners and decision makers is evidence-based and moves away from anecdotes and assumptions.

The role of BECOME as the evaluator was to facilitate community leadership in inquiry, discovery, and learning. BECOME works at the intersection of relationship, research, and restoration. We believe that through building and mending the social fabric through culturally responsive evaluation and community based action research, collective healing occurs that transforms communities.

Together, BECOME, Enlace Chicago, and Little Village community members interrogated the meaning and impact of "welcoming," which itself has multiple meanings and connotations. The City of Chicago and the State of Illinois are both "welcoming" places, meaning that they provide basic services such as shelter, food, and medical care to everyone regardless of immigration status. Additionally, legislation has passed at the municipal and state levels that protect immigrants from Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and other punitive federal immigration enforcement bodies and practices.[4] Another aspect of welcoming that is visited in this report is the connection to belonging. Little Village residents have also experienced various degrees of welcoming. The neighborhood has been a port of entry for Mexican immigrants for several decades, but Little Village too has gone through many demographic and community changes over time. Questions on welcoming will remain critical as Chicago continues to see the arrival of new neighbors.

BECOME

Transforming Our Reality

BECOME is a 501c3 non-profit Center for Community Engagement and Social Change with a commitment to social justice and thriving communities. We spark and sustain community transformation by unlocking the cultural strengths and intrinsic wisdom of the people. Together, we realize our collective liberation by developing communal care and power. We contribute to this cause through program evaluation, training, coaching, coalition building, facilitation, and strategic planning.

Methodology

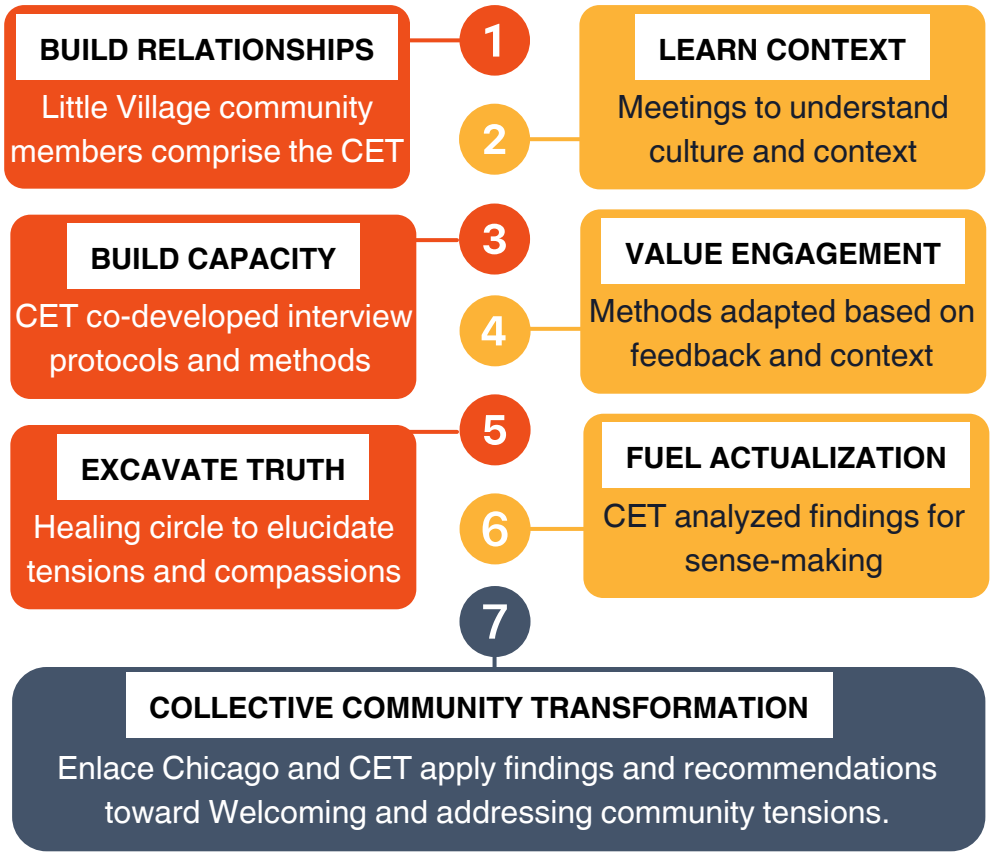
Program Overview

For the implementation of the WNLI, BECOME applied our model of Catalytic Evaluation. This model of evaluation is designed for the initiative to be a societal or community intervention where the process and data are used to catapult findings into transformative community-centered outcomes. In this case, this model included:

- In-depth relationship and network building.
- Creating and building the evaluation capacity of a Community Evaluation Team (CET) in community participatory research practices.
- Applying developmental evaluation practices for data and findings to feed back into transformative solutions and ongoing innovation driven by the community.

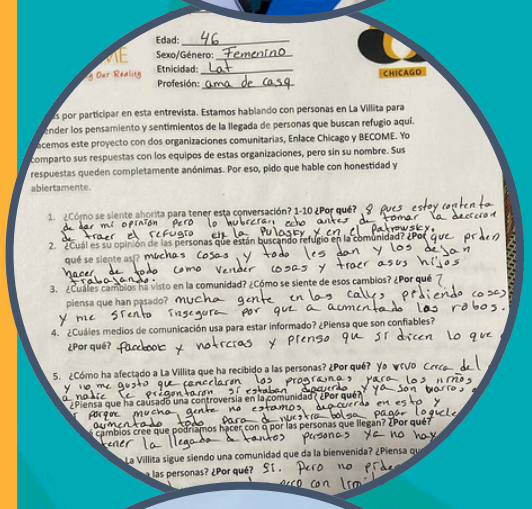
Through the community participatory research design, a catalytic and culturally responsive approach was implemented throughout the WNLI.

Figure 1 shows examples of how this catalytic methodology leads to community transformation.



CET: Community Leadership

A key purpose of a Community Evaluation Team, or CET, is for community members to have a voice and exercise their leadership in what happens in their neighborhood, the services that are provided, the policies that influence their lives, and the dynamics they want to impact. As a key component of culturally responsive evaluation (CRE) and community participatory research, a CET has the capacity to change "power relations both because [community evaluators] are controlling research processes that have historically been used to control them and because the knowledge they generate can support broader social struggles."[5]



The WNLI Community Evaluation Team consisted of eight residents of the majority Mexican Little Village community. All were Latina women, and five of them monolingual Spanish speakers. Collectively, they guided and informed the evaluation and research, conducted all community interviews, and analyzed the final data. The evaluator served as facilitator and coach and did direct data analysis.

"I learned to listen and not judge. I learned to ask questions openly and not be afraid to do so." - CET member

The WNLI created a unique space for the leadership of women of color.[6] Because of their intersectional identities — Latina, immigrant born or first-generation, and mostly monolingual Spanish-speaking — the CET members are less visible and their voices more silenced than their white male counterparts. Gloria Anzaldúa, a pioneer of *una consciencia de mujer* as Hispana intersectionality, called for women's leadership and voice in "participating in the creation of yet another culture, a new story to explain the world and our participation in it, a new value system with images and symbols that connect us to each other."[7]

Research Inquiries and Implementation

The WNLI had the following research inquiries:

- What are the responses and opinions of long-term community residents to the arrival of new neighbors seeking asylum to the Little Village neighborhood?
- What are the primary impacts of newly arriving individuals and families on the day-to-day life of existing Little Village residents?
- What is the best model for continuous listening and learning in which community members contribute to and shape the data from their own neighborhood for future decision making?
- What are recommendations for Enlace Chicago to respond to community residents' concerns?

To interrogate these questions, the CET and BECOME co-developed protocols[8] and led or supported the following:

- 172 community listening interviews (143 included in the findings due to limitations, see below)
- 8 grasstops interviews with organizational directors and local legislators
- 7 interviews with newly arrived individuals
- 4 Enlace Chicago front-line staff member interviews
- 1 Healing Circle with Enlace Chicago staff and CET members with their loved ones

For the community interviews, the participatory research model provided a place for divergent responses: "The value in participatory research is that disagreement, dissent and misperceptions are unearthed and, rather that being smoothed over in consensus, are often the sources of new directions and additional data for the project. Differences do not detract from the conclusions but make them richer and more valuable."[9] By activating their own personal community networks, people were included who may have been left out of more traditional research studies, and deeper and more complex responses were elicited.

Additionally, the original methodology included a large community meeting and Enlace Chicago staff focus groups. With the application of culturally responsive evaluation practices to the WNLI, the team collectively decided to change course. Intense emotions were emerging in the interview responses. CET members expressed the challenge of remaining neutral while facing anger and resentment coming from their families, friends, neighbors, and others in their own communities. Furthermore, a previous community meeting held in

neighboring Brighton Park was beset by angry residents condemning housing efforts for newly arriving families.[10] In light of this, the CET chose to pivot toward additional interviews and the healing circle. The healing circle, in particular, created space to explore tensions and empathy felt both by CET members as well as their loved ones who were vicariously involved in the project.

> **"Emergence moves at the speed of trust, designing processes that get the right folks in the room to do the work that is most needed in these times."**
> **- adrienne marie brown[10]**

Limitations

Several limitations emerged with the participatory research methodology and building the CET. First, because the CET members were themselves community members of Little Village, they too held opinions and beliefs about the newcomers to their community. Although a commitment to neutrality was given from the start, biases inevitably emerged during the community interviews. Following this emergence, 29 community interviews were eliminated from the dataset and an additional training on bias was conducted with CET members.

Additionally, by relying on community relationships, some demographic groups were overrepresented and others were not included. A great majority of community interview respondents identified as Latine (Latino, Hispanic, and/or Mexican), and most as female between the ages of 40-49. These are the very same demographics held by the CET members. In another iteration of a community listening initiative, greater diversity can be sought in the CET to activate a wider and more diverse network of community respondents and therefore responses.

Findings

> **Hay tantísimas fronteras que dividen a la gente, pero por cada frontera existe también un puente.**
> **- Gina Valdés[12]**

The Welcoming Neighborhood Listening Initiative captured sentiments and opinions of Little Village residents and primary stakeholders. The moment reflects a cultural political phenomenon of instigated migration caused by upheaval in origin countries and U.S. federal and state policy at the border during a contentious presidential election season. All interviews and activities were conducted from November 2023 to May 2024.

Community Interviews

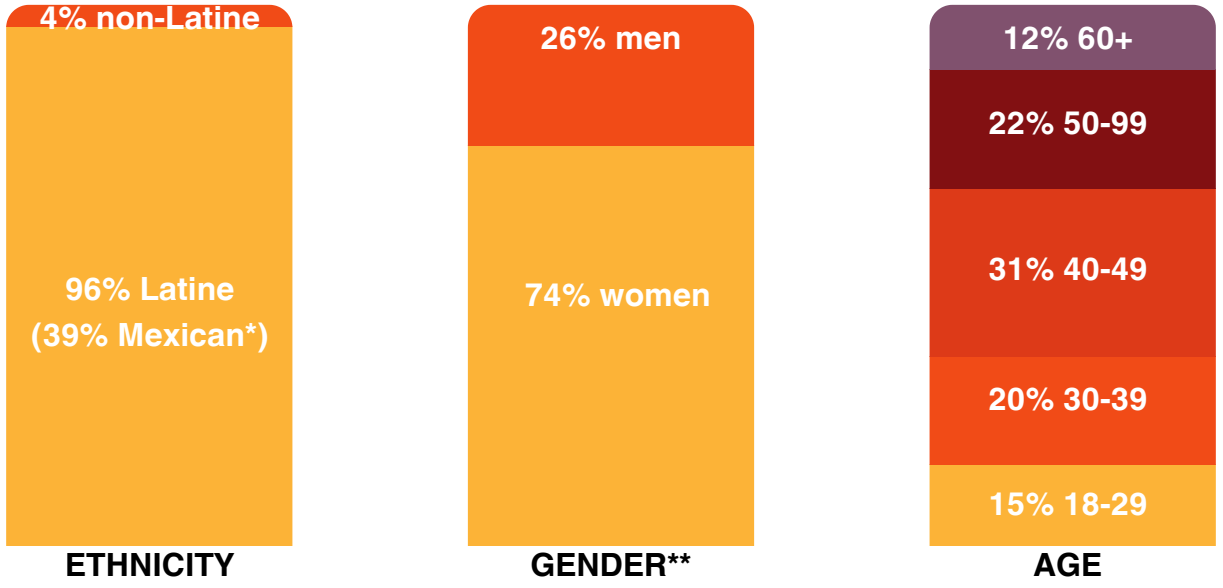
Conducting community interviews was the primary activity of the Community Evaluation Team in order to gather responses of established community members about the arrival of new immigrants and asylum seekers to the neighborhood. CET members activated their personal networks of family, friends, neighbors, local business owners, teachers, and other community members for the interviews.

The team of eight CET members facilitated almost 200 community interviews over six weeks, and gathered luminous, contradictory, depressing, and inspiring sentiments and statements from their fellow Little Village neighbors.

"This project helped the community express their feelings and feel listened to and excited to have their opinions count." - CET Member

Interview responses were anonymous with only basic demographic information solicited: gender, age, ethnicity, and profession. Figure 2 below shows that the majority of interview respondents identify as Latine (Latino, Hispanic, and/or Mexican), and most as female between 40-49 years old, as stated above.

Figure 2. *Demographic information*

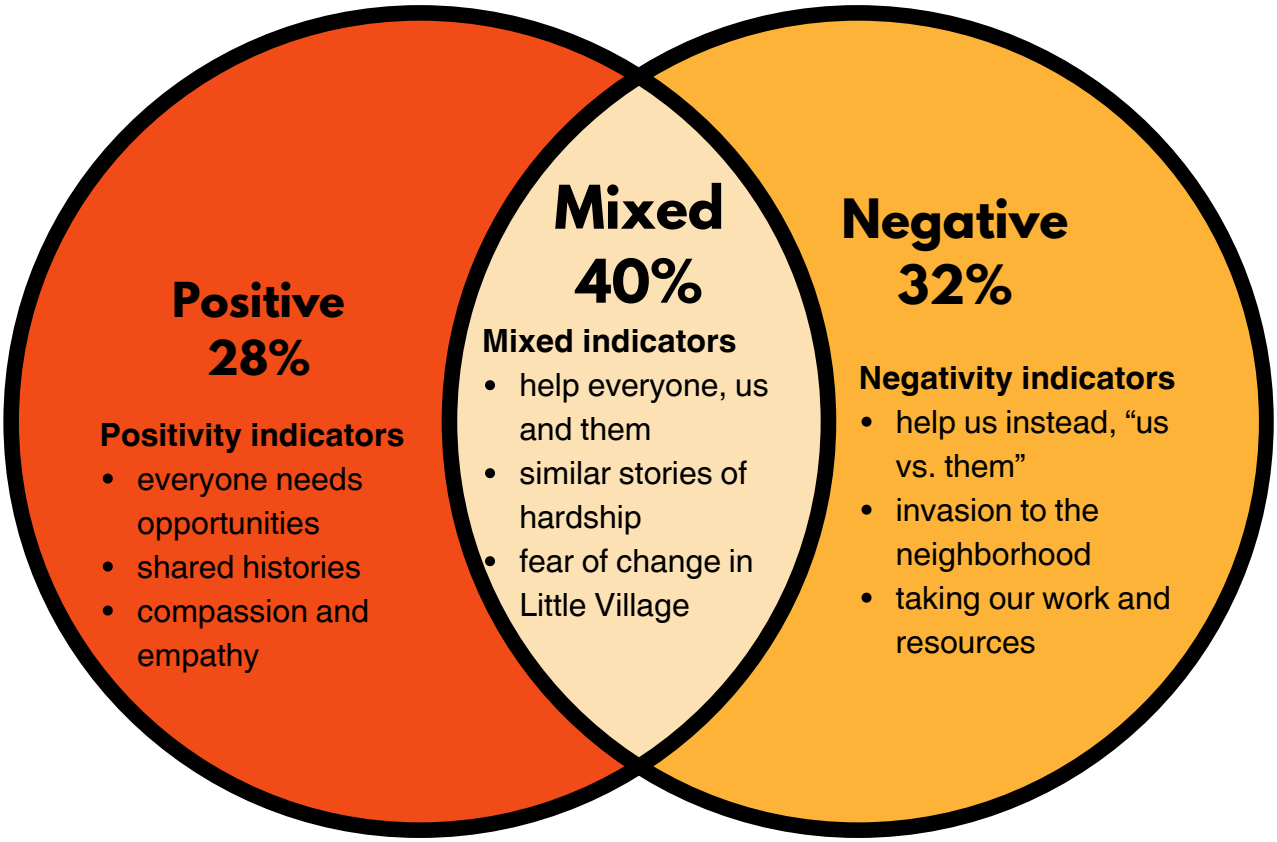


* Community interview respondents were asked about ethnicity. 39% of "Latine" interviewees responded either with "Mexican" or referenced Mexican nationality during the interview.
** Only male and female genders were identified by interview respondents.

In addition to ethnicity, gender, and age, interviewees were asked to share their professions, which were then categorized using the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics occupation profiles.[13] The highest percentage of professions indicated included education (10%), production and factory work (10%), business owners and/or sales (7%), and healthcare support such as community health workers (7%). However, the largest listed occupation was identified as a stay-at-home caretaker, a position held only by women in this dataset, at 30% of all respondents.

For analysis, interviews were categorized as overall positive, overall negative, or mixed indicating both positive and negative characteristics. Most interviewees expressed mixed and complex feelings, with respondents holding both empathy for and fear about people newly arriving and the real or perceived impacts on their community. Figure 3 below displays the percentage breakdown of overall responses into positive, negative, and mixed.

Figure 3. *Most responses are mixed and fewest are overall positive.*



This statement by a 40- to 49-year-old woman in the education field represents a typical mixed response:

"I feel compassion for the people who are coming here because I understand that they're coming here for refuge and for a better life. But at the same time, I feel a little confused in my feelings."

Differences between various demographic groups emerge, an analysis largely produced by the CET members. Depending on profession, age, and gender, responses vary as shown in table 1 below. However, these categories intersect in sense-making of the responses.

Table 1. *Positive responses varied by demographic grouping*

	MIXED	NEGATIVE	POSITIVE
GENDER			
Women	45%	35%	20%
Women with employment+	*47%*	*30%*	*23%*
Stay at home caregivers	*49%*	*35%*	*16%*
Men	24%	24%	52%
Men with employment++	*31%*	*23%*	*46%*
AGE			
18-29	27%	9%	64%
30-39	46%	29%	25%
40-49	36%	41%	23%
50-59	52%	32%	16%
60+	33%	45%	22%
PROFESSION			
Stay at home	49%	35%	16%
Education	28%	28%	44%
Production, Factory	43%	57%	0%
Business, Sales	40%	40%	20%
Healthcare support	70%	10%	20%

+ Including students and retired; excluding unemployed, stay at home, and unindicated.
++ The sample size for unemployed men was too small for analysis (n=2).

AGE. Age is the most impactful factor on responses. Younger interviewees aged 18-29 by far showed the highest positive response to new community members. Many in this category may have grown up or been born in a U.S. multicultural society and are accustomed to living with immigrants from around the world. On the contrary, interviewees aged 50 and over had the highest negative response to new arrivals. These respondents are possibly facing the impacts of protracted undocumented status with no retirement savings or social security benefits. Various immigration policies, alongside generational gaps, may impact age groups' perceptions (see policy implications below).[14]

Policy Implications on Response Indicators and Age

- **The Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986**, which provided immigration amnesty to an estimated 3 million mostly Latine people, affected age groups 50 and older. Lower than average positive responses and higher mixed responses may correspond to having received amnesty after a time of struggle and uncertainty. Additionally, the shadow economy of hiring undocumented workers arose as a side effect of this legislation, creating unanticipated job scarcity and competition.[15] A mix of resentment and compassion are seen in their responses:

"[New residents] don't have jobs and struggle a lot. When I got here, I saw the same need in the same position, and it feels bad to go back to the past. It's selfish to say, 'Why are they giving them this? And why didn't they give us this?' We're in a different era, it's different. We would have liked to have had that opportunity as well, but we couldn't."

- **The Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996** radically changed the immigration process and made steps to change documentation status much more difficult than previously. This legislation "criminalized immigrants and centered imprisonment and punishment as core components of the nation's immigration system."[16] Therefore, interviewees aged 40-55 may have arrived in the United States and lived here under the narrative of criminality and with few, if any, opportunities to change their documentation status. Un- and/or underemployment due to lack of work permits has been a long-term impact of this policy.

"People are saying that much has been done for them without them deserving it because we had to navigate a lot for many years. Us in the shadows and them arriving and fixing their status and giving them work permits. Most people I talk to are against this."

- **Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)** in 2012 created an administrative pathway for childhood arrivals to gain work permits, and affected interviewees aged 30-39. Illinois has the 3rd largest population of DACA-recipient residents, the majority of whom are from Mexico. Data shows that DACA recipients, despite living with temporary status, have greatly benefitted economically and emotionally, and may feel more empathy for newly arriving individuals.

"I believe that everyone deserves an opportunity to have a better life. And we have to understand that these people came to this country to make their lives better."

GENDER. Gender identity correlated with overall positivity or negativity toward newly arriving neighbors. Men indicated the highest number of positive responses; women indicated the least positive and highest negative responses overall. A public community role, such as current or previous employment or being a student, was a primary factor towards positivity. Of those who indicated a profession, 93% of men hold a public role while only 53% of women have a public role in their community.

"I offer them my friendship when they come into my work. I can help because I know the area. I help two guys by giving them rides. It's something I can do." - Employed male

PROFESSION. Profession and gender acted as the most salient intersected indicator toward overall positivity or negativity toward newly arriving people. Men interviewed who were employed outside the home have had the opportunity to interact with new residents personally, generating increased knowledge and exposure through individualized experiences. Employed women who also have had these opportunities showed slightly increased positive responses and slightly decreased negative responses.

Specific employment categories also indicate differences in positive or negative responses. Educators, 93% of whom were women respondents, showed the highest positive perceptions of newly arriving neighbors.

"Of course we should help them. We should help everyone no matter where they come from." - Educator

Conversely, interviewees who work in production and sales industries hold the highest negative responses. A common theme emerged of job loss because of employment being offered to new residents, some of whom have had their asylum applications approved and have received work permits through Temporary Protective Status (TPS).

"There are people here who have been looking for work for 20-30 years and when they finally get one it's not secure. All of a sudden, [places of employment] tell you there's no work and they give you days off because they have people they have to give work to [with legal work permits]. They're giving them job preference."

Most of these comments referred to overhearing job loss and scarcity from other residents rather than through direct experience.

STAY-AT-HOME CARETAKERS: AN INTERSECTION OF GENDER + PROFESSION.
Stay-at-home caregivers (amas de casa) indicated the highest correlation with negative perceptions, with higher than average negative responses (35%) and fewer positive responses than those employed outside of the home. Many caregivers stated that they do not leave the house often and receive much of their information from television news, other stay-at-home friends and neighbors, and their husbands. Stay-at-home caretaking women with limited exposure to external experiences and sources of information may be experiencing confirmation bias by getting their information from few or a small selection of sources. Additionally, in these single income homes, real or perceived threats to household income traditionally earned by male partners foments competition between long-term residents and newcomers, as articulated by this stay-at-home caretaker:

"It's as if a kind of racism is being created between us Latinos, even though it's not their [new neighbors'] fault. But I'm fed up."

First-hand experiences with newcomers are few and likely influence their overall perceptions toward negativity. Direct interactions between groups may overcome selective exposure and confirmation bias toward negative perceptions. This can be achieved through community conversations with a component on cross-cultural learning.[17] Recommendations detail political education and cultural humility training for front-line staff members of community based organizations who interact with new and long-term neighborhood residents.

WELCOMING AS BELONGING. Community interviewees were questioned on whether Little Village is a "welcoming" community, allowing individual interpretation of the term. Out of 136 responses, 65% responded yes, 28% responded no, and 4% gave a mixed response. Additionally, 7% said Little Village is welcoming only for people of Mexican descent and/or nationality. A salient issue in the data is the notion of belonging and the history of Little Village as a welcoming community to Mexican immigrants. The majority of respondents express welcoming for all, offering the neighborhood as a place of belonging for many types of people:

"Little Village is a community of immigrants and we help each other out."

One respondent, however, noted the tension in the neighborhood of what welcoming means and who it is for.

"Many people are mad and I don't see why because if they were Mexicans they wouldn't be mad. They would say, 'let's help out our countrymen.'"

COMMUNITY RECOMMENDATIONS. Community interviewees were asked about long-term solutions. Table 2 below details solutions offered by community members disaggregated by response type.

Table 2. *Service supports and policy change were the most mentioned solutions*

SOLUTIONS	OVERALL	MIXED	NEGATIVE	POSITIVE
Continued help	27%	23%	20%	48%
Work permits, immigration reform	24%	26%	28%	20%
Send to other areas	17%	19%	28%	3%
Help current residents	6%	4%	13%	3%
Deportation	6%		20%	
Help everyone	6%	11%	4%	3%

Several respondents held mixed and conflicting views on solutions.

"I hope we continue helping people, but we also have to see how all this is affecting our community. New residents have not been placed in white or African American communities. The plan should be to distribute newcomers in all communities so that there is equity socially and economically."

Sadly, another solution mentioned by interviewees was deportation of newcomers, indicating the level of frustration, resentment, and desperation in long-term residents.

"There are a lot of people who have been here for a long time, like 10 years, and they're here paying taxes and they don't receive anything. In return, the people who have just arrived receive better benefits. This makes me feel bad because my husband was here for many years and was never able to receive benefits or work legally."

A primary recommendation of this study is advocating for comprehensive immigration reform that provides a path to permanent legal status for the 11 million people who are undocumented in the United States (see recommendations page 26).

Healing Circle

Indigenous Practice to Restorative Justice

As part of the emergence of the WNLI, BECOME facilitated a healing circle with the CET members and their closest loved ones after learning of the challenges they experienced during the project, specifically in the community interview process. Talking with diverse community residents, including close family members and friends who held divergent viewpoints, created pain points that were impacting the neutrality of the interviews and the enthusiasm toward the project overall. These challenges were voiced by the CET as the following:

What does "welcoming" mean to our community?

How far does welcoming extend when we still have unresolved needs and undelivered resources for people here already?

How do we resolve the tension of seeing new people and having empathy for those who have been through similar journeys as me, my family, or my neighbors and knowing we were not given the same welcome?

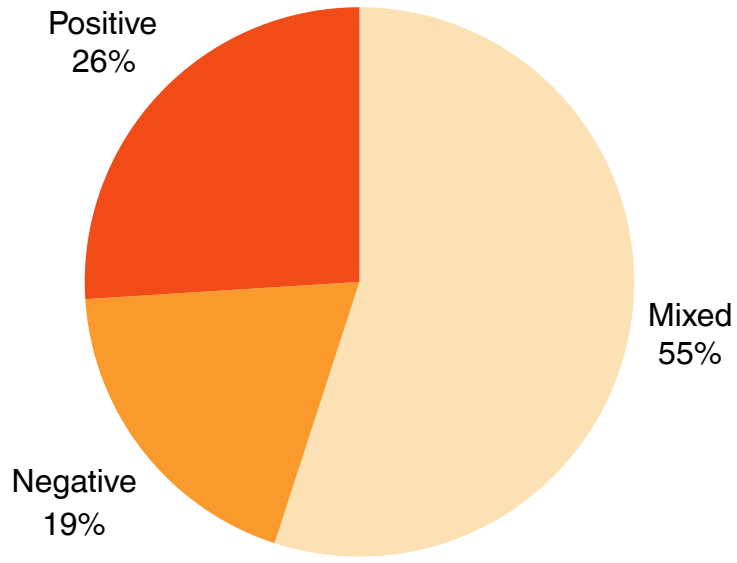
Along with the CET and their loved ones, other circle participants included Enlace Chicago staff involved in the project and BECOME facilitators. Every person present was invited in two rounds to share their experiences about 1) a time they felt excluded, ignored, or not heard, and how did that make them feel, and 2) the opposite of when they felt seen, included, or truly heard or of a time when they helped someone feel seen, included or heard?

The results exposed the shared humanity built amongst very different individuals. Regardless of country of origin, age, gender, or profession, their shared struggles and triumphs emerged. Each individual's journey of arriving to that moment of the circle in the midst of changes in their neighborhood created a cohesive narrative of possibility.

Enlace Chicago Staff Interviews

Four interviews were conducted with Enlace Chicago front-line staff members who interact with both long-term and new residents on a day-to-day basis. They were also Little Village community members themselves. As seen below in figure 4, Enlace Chicago staff members responded less negatively than average.

Figure 4. *Enlace Chicago staff responded less negatively*



When profession is disaggregated for the types of positions held by Enlace Chicago staff members and community leaders who engage with the organization – Community Social Service, Education, and Healthcare Support (that includes Community Health Workers) – mixed responses increase, and negative responses decrease. Front-line staff members regularly interact with new and long-term residents, their families, and their children.

These respondents also hold dual positions of staff members at a community based organization as well as being community members themselves. They represent and support community members while sharing much of the same desires, resentments, and fears as the people they interact with daily through their employment. As one staff member commented:

"First, we must reconcile the community. We are here to help the community, but this situation has become polarizing. The community gets angry and frustrated that Enlace is helping new arrivals. It feels like rivalry: 'Why is Enlace helping them get work permits, and they never helped us that way?'"

Another primary recommendation of this study is to provide training to front-line staff members of community based organizations on cultural humility to reconcile their dual positions and reduce organizational and community tensions.

New Neighbor Interviews

To add depth to understanding welcoming in the neighborhood, interviews were conducted with several asylum seeking new residents in Little Village. Seven people were recruited for interviews through Enlace Chicago's immigration team. Four interviewees arrived from Venezuela, two from Mexico, and one from Nicaragua. Only three of the seven went through the shelter systems upon arrival.

HOUSING PLACEMENT. The shelter system has been publicly criticized and has faced many challenges (additional information below in the section on "Grasstops Interviews"). However, those who did arrive at shelters were able to access basic services more quickly, such as a medical card, public assistance (LINK), and support in applying for asylum or other temporary status. This facilitated other benefits in their lives, such as children getting immediate medical release to attend schools. For instance, one respondent who is currently in the shelter system narrated that her four-year-old daughter is thriving at school since this is her first time in formal education. Another individual who arrived to stay with family has not been able to get medical clearance for his children to attend school even after being here several months because they have not applied for a medical card and cannot afford to pay for a doctor's visit. This information helps point to the need to establish a permanent and sustained shelter system for all newly arriving people to the Chicago area and Illinois at large.

EMPLOYMENT. Of those interviewed, four were unemployed at the time. Country of origin seemed to impact the ability to find employment. Both respondents originally from Mexico had some gainful employment due to either family support or previous familiarity with the neighborhood and the United States. An additional factor in securing employment may be the gap between previous employment in their home country and work available in the U.S. All four individuals who arrived from Venezuela and the person from Nicaragua held professional or educational positions, such as a nurse, professor, university student, or business owner. Only one of them has found work currently as a house cleaner. However, every person interviewed cited finding gainful employment and "getting ahead" as a primary goal.

A recognized barrier for immigrants and other newly arrived people to the U.S. is the non-recognition of foreign education and credentials.[18] In 2018, Illinois passed legislation that allows for professional licensing regardless of immigration status or possessing a social security number.[19] Although recommendations are for policy advocacy around comprehensive immigration reform and work permits for all, Illinois as a welcoming state does provide some measures for immigrants without legal work status.

WELCOMING AS BELONGING. Country of origin also impacted a person's sense of belonging to the Little Village neighborhood. Six of the seven new neighbor interviewees reported feeling calm in the neighborhood. However, half of them (n=3), all from Venezuela, reported not venturing out into the community much because of perceived danger (n=2) or not being sociable (n=1). One respondent mentioned the discrimination felt because of national origin:

"We live in a Mexican community. The cultural differences are hard; [the people there] are different. Most Venezuelans have come through shelters and seek a lot of help. I have felt discrimination, especially at work." - New Venezuelan neighbor

On the contrary, those who originate from Mexico in this wave of arrivals note the sense of belonging felt in the Little Village community, despite being a newcomer:

"Coming to this Mexican community, it feels like Mexico. We speak the same language, the same products are here, it's the same culture."

Changes in the neighborhood and community belonging are not only felt by long-term residents but by newly arriving people as they navigate building their lives in a new location. *It is hoped that cultural responsiveness training for front-line staff of CBOs can help foment increased empathy and welcoming as they interact with both long-term and new neighborhood residents. Community workshops and* cafecitos *welcome to all where various residents intermingle may also contribute to a sense of community belonging.*

Grasstops Interviews

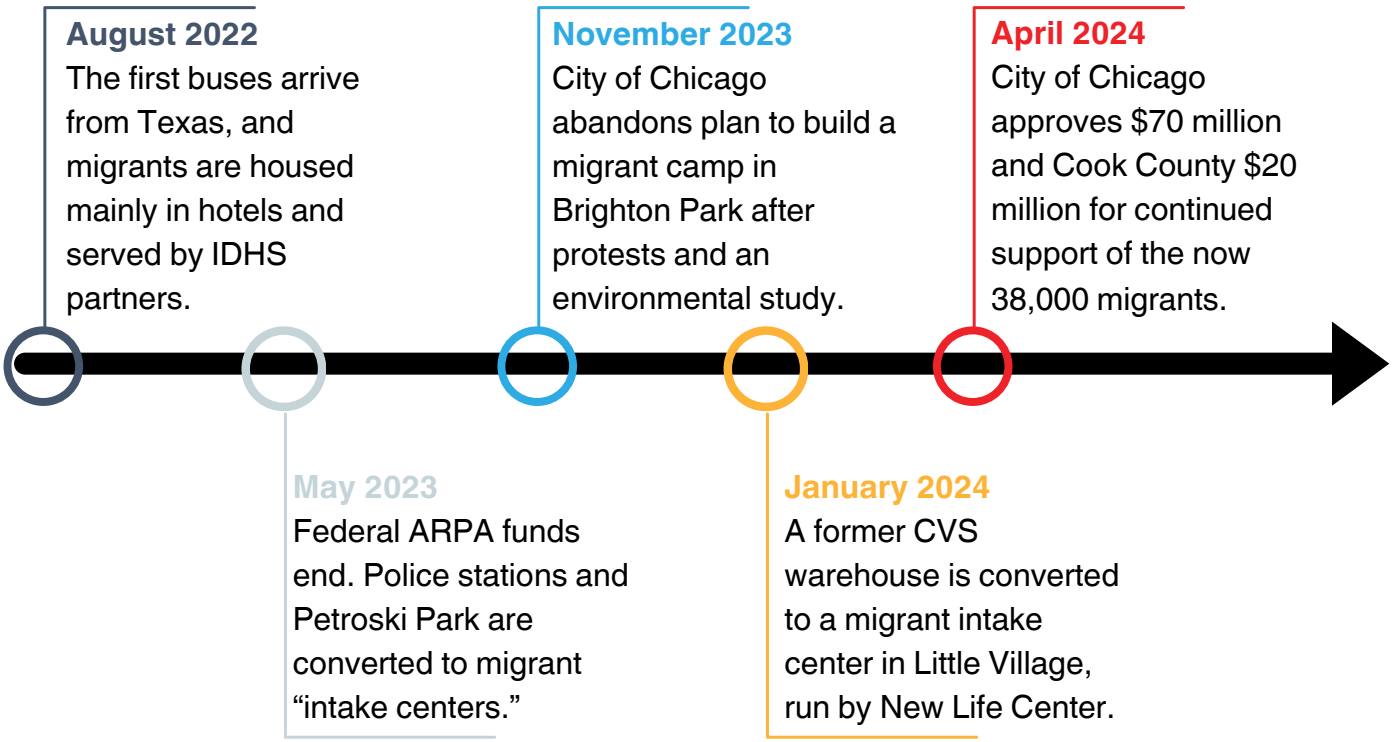
Eight nonprofit and government leaders across the Chicago area were interviewed for this study to gather and map important contextual information.[20] Inquiries included timelines, types of resources and supports provided, and the impacts on community organizations as they interacted with new residents and coalitions to manage the influx of almost 40,000 new people.

PRIMARY STAKEHOLDERS. A salient piece that emerged from these interviews was the role that federal, state, and local actors, institutions, and funders played in the effectiveness of resource distribution. In August 2022 when bussing asylum seekers to Chicago from Texas first began, the State of Illinois led the support effort using American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds that were allocated during the Covid-19 public health emergency to bolster economic recovery. The availability of these funds allowed for people arriving to be housed in hotels and receive medical and other services provided by the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) through Illinois Welcoming Center organizational partnerships. When the ARPA funds ceased in May 2023, the support effort shifted. As one respondent stated,

> **"The federal end of Covid money changed things into a humanitarian crisis."**

From there, support was managed by the State of Illinois through IDHS and the City of Chicago, at times in conflict. Private funds were also provided by certain philanthropic foundations, but not at the same level or consistency that occurred during the Covid-19 crisis. Figure 5 below shows a general timeline of activities and actors.

Figure 5. *Financial support has come from a variety of institutions over time*



SERVICES AND VALUES. Provision of services, especially housing and medical care, was not always dispersed evenly. Practices for contracting services proved confusing to some organizations and detrimental to newly arriving families. In the first months, food and basic needs were dispersed by community organizations without state reimbursement until funding and ownership coalesced. Then, once shelters were established, some qualified organizations were locked out of providing support because of existing contracts with shelter providers in the housing and homelessness sector. More recently, the contracting by the City of Chicago of private companies received a sharp critique after the death of a 5-year-old in a privately run shelter in Pilsen.[21]

Several interview respondents criticized the use of private companies in doing what is essentially humanitarian work, and linked the practice of private contracting with the abandonment of values such as dignity and welcoming within the resettlement process. For example, Illinois' welcoming centers were formed to eliminate systemic barriers that immigrants face in receiving support services.[22] However, as various state agencies, organizations, and private contractors step in and step back, cost has gone up while accountability has been dangerously reduced. As one interviewee asserted, a welcoming City of Chicago and State of Illinois should be rooted in supporting immigrants as deserving human rights and dignity:

"We have not been living up to our values of dignity, respect, or with a focus on health, wellness, and safety."

ORGANIZATIONAL IMPACTS. Community organizations also have felt the impact of asylum seeking families arriving to their constituent areas, and responded in various ways based on their missions, values, and services. Some organizations shifted to mutual aid and were able to expand their support service programs greatly to meet needs. Brighton Park Neighborhood Council (BPNC), for example, scaled up certain departments.

"[BPNC] expanded capacity, created vertical opportunities for staff, and new leadership infrastructure for promotions. Space also emerged for tough conversations with people connecting to their own immigrant stories."

In another example, New Life Centers has been providing food, clothing, and other basic resources to new and long-term families in need, becoming the de facto mutual aid center in Little Village. With state funding, the New Vecinos program at New Life was created to lead these efforts. The organization also received funding to manage the intake shelter in Little Village in the previous CVS warehouse space.[23]

Enlace Chicago expanded its legal aid program to meet additional need, as well. However, like in many organizations, tensions exist between increasing programmatic capacity to meet emergent and expanding needs and the vicarious trauma intersecting with lived experience of front-line workers. Staff members across the organization acknowledge that the situation is impacting work in many ways, including work relationships.

SUSTAINABLE INFRASTRUCTURE. As organizations met the needs of their communities, learnings have emerged on how to build sustainability and infrastructure for future iterations. These include:

- Developing a crisis response plan that addresses scaling and mitigates burnout.
- Prioritizing data collection for data-driven decision making to respond to emerging needs.
- Assessing organizational strengths and challenges to build better partnerships and coalitions.

As such, collaboration was mentioned repeatedly as a challenge throughout the response. As one respondent asserted,

"We should be proactive not reactive. Learnings are available across communities but we're not reaching out. Pilsen, Brighton Park, Belmont Cragin. Our residents from one neighborhood are involved in another organization's programs. We need a unified plan across neighborhoods."

This holds true in the public sector as well. As mentioned by multiple respondents, immigration-focused organizations have been at city and state tables to address the "migrant crisis" while housing and homelessness-focused organizations are in different spaces. As mentioned by one participant,

"This has been framed as an immigration issue, but it's really a housing and homelessness issue. We've needed homeless and housing contractors and organizations in the space because this is actually about resources."

Reframing the situation can also move us from "migrant crisis" to a welcoming, values-based opportunity for Chicago and Illinois. As one leader stated,

"We have a declining population in Chicago and Cook County, and a declining birthrate across the country. Schools are closing because of this decreased population. Immigration is down as people are returning to their home countries. These are hard but necessarily points to make right now."

Recommendations and Conclusions

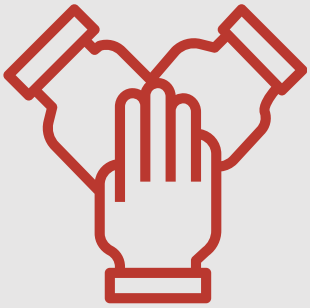
Chicago is facing an urgent moment in terms of migration. On the near horizon, the Democratic National Convention in August 2024 is expected to usher in yet another wave of politically motivated bussing of incoming asylum seekers from Texas to Chicago. The goal, as expressed by some including progressive Chicago alderpeople, is disruption and fomenting discord.[24] If bussing occurs, Chicago will have to support potentially thousands of additional people while also dealing with local protests and political discontent while in the national spotlight. It is unclear whether the $70 million funding promise from the City and additional support from the State will be sufficient to meet the needs of an unknown number of newly arriving people.

Longer term, climate change is driving an unprecedented number of displacements and migrations. In 2022, 31.8 million people worldwide were internally displaced because of climate-related disasters, the highest number ever recorded.[25] In the same year, 3.2 million inhabitants of the U.S. were displaced or evacuated due to natural disasters, 500,000 of whom did not return to their place of residence.[26] Barring much accelerated mitigation of climate change, rising sea levels are expected to internally displace another 13 million U.S. inhabitants by 2100. These numbers only account for internal migration and do not even include the movement of people across international borders, namely from Latin American to the resource-rich United States. Chicago may already be a climate-migration destination, being situated on a large body of fresh water and away from some natural disasters such as hurricanes and wildfires.[27]

Without direct consideration of these two migration drivers, community members, staff members, sector leaders, and those straddling various domains provided many and varied recommendations that correlate to expected migration challenges. These recommendations range from scaling mutual aid and supports, providing culturally responsive training, and advocating for policy change. The recommendations are directed toward community organizations that offer direct service provision, that organize a base of community members, and/or that engage in policy advocacy at the local, state, or federal levels.

Recommendations

1. Develop an education campaign for front-line staff that is replicable across community organizations.



2. Build coordination and collaboration between organizations throughout Chicago and the suburbs.

3. Focus on a narrative of resources support rather than migration because need exists across communities.

4. Educate and advocate for comprehensive immigration reform and work permits for all at federal, state, and local levels.

5. Establish permanent resource centers and shelters throughout the city available for all in need.

EDUCATION CAMPAIGN. Front-line staff members, including full-time providers and case managers and part-time community health and education workers, straddle two identities that are, at times, in conflict. The majority of these employees are community members across Chicago neighborhoods who must maintain neutrality at their places of employment while also feeling similar resentments and frustrations as their neighbors. As one Enlace Chicago staff member stated,

"We're dealing with situations that we're not being trained on."

Providing culturally responsive training that supports cultural humility and critical self-reflection, particularly for front-line staff members and directors and managers who lead team and organizational culture, can address the tension and resentment that has arisen from real and perceived ideas of disparate treatment between new arrivals and long-term residents.

Staff members are not the only ones who would benefit from this type of training. Community interview participants also named misinformation and known lack of information or reliable sources as a problem. Several community members named the necessity of education intervention to address this rampant misinformation:

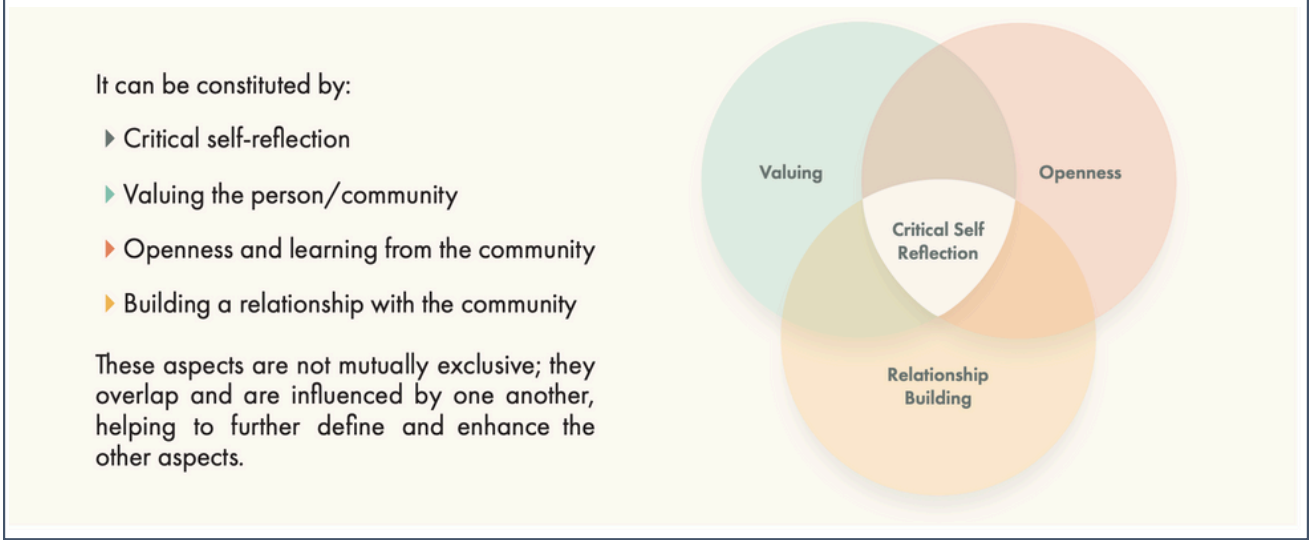
"They say a lot of things about the Venezuelans, that they're thieves or lazy just looking for handouts. But they say the same about us Mexicans, that we're all narcotraffickers. Not everything you hear is the truth. I don't know what to believe."

Another community resident mentioned the need for knowledge and compassion for herself and her community:

"One change is to start from within so that we can also accept ourselves and accept other people."

A training program can address discrimination as well as provide facts and data on the kinds of public and private supports given not only to new arrivals but to longer-term residents. Training can also help answer the questions raised and mitigate tensions expressed in community interviews. Even more importantly, this type of education campaign should be replicable across Chicago-area communities while informed by the specific dynamics of each neighborhood. Existing coalition tables and neighborhood-based networks provide opportunity to scale and replicate culturally responsive training modules.

Figure 6. *Cultural humility training for staff and community members addresses cross-cultural tensions*[28]



ORGANIZATIONAL COLLABORATION AND COORDINATION. Several Chicago neighborhoods and suburbs are serving new asylum seekers. While collaboration is occurring, multiple tables convene various stakeholders that are not necessarily in communication. Some organizations were convened by the State at the start or are part of the Illinois Immigrant Task Force or serve as an Illinois Welcoming Center; others collaborate directly with the City of Chicago; and others are members of or anchor various United Way of Metro Chicago Neighborhood Networks. As previously mentioned, these existing coalition tables and established networks would be an effective vehicle to provide comprehensive and scaled cultural training and political education campaigns about why asylum seekers are arriving now and how best to support them and future new residents.

In addition to cross-organizational collaboration, increased coordination across sectors is also a need. As mentioned previously, the medical and housing sectors are particularly siloed. A separation exists between supporting long-term unhoused people through established coalitions and government tables and serving arriving migrants through new immigration positions, despite both populations having similar needs in terms of medical care and housing.[29] Driving the separation are tensions between established Black and Latine leaders due to long-standing under-resourcing of the city's communities of color. For example, while the majority of new residents come from Venezuela, 75% of people experiencing homelessness in Chicago are African American. This conflict was underlined by Chicago City Council members during the April 2024 vote for increased funding for bussed asylum seekers.[30]

SHIFT TO A NARRATIVE OF RESOURCES. A narrative shift is needed to frame the current situation as a resource issue rather than an immigration issue. Both longer-term and newly arriving residents need similar resources, such as basic goods, housing, healthcare, and community socialization. Communities across Chicago are deeply in need, and advocating for equitable rather than separate material allocation can help address neighborhood tensions and unsilo organizations and sectors. At the community level, the narrative and worldview shift should be included in a cultural humility curriculum.

ADVOCATE FOR WORK PERMITS. Tension between new and long-term residents mostly is situated in disparate provision of work permits. Some new asylum seekers have received Temporary Protected Status (TPS) granting them legal work permits, while long-term undocumented people, numbering at almost half a million in Illinois and 90% of whom live in the greater Chicago area, have few if any options to obtain work permits. As one community interview participant stated,

"Most of us are disappointed that these people are given a lot of help and those of us who have been here for a long time have never been given anything. And to be fighting so long for immigration reform. It's unfair."

This disparity has given rise to work permit advocacy campaigns not only in Chicago but across the country.[31] Advocates have been using several strategies:

- Organizing workers who have experienced workplace violations to apply for work permits through the DALE (Deferred Action for Labor Enforcement) program.[32]
- Mobilizing through the #workpermitsforall campaign to pressure the Biden administration to grant temporary work permits to undocumented people.[33]
- Moving a resolution through the Illinois state legislature to also put legislative pressure on the Biden administration for work permits.[34]

These measures are temporary as they require executive administrative action. The only permanent solution at the federal level is for Congress to pass comprehensive immigration reform, a move that many deem unlikely as federal legislators are focused on the border.[35] Therefore, other creative solutions should also be considered, such as state or municipal work permits.

PERMANENT INFRASTRUCTURE. The infrastructure to support newly arriving people has been variable with different managers at different times. A proposed narrative shift toward equitable resource distribution for all communities in need requires that permanent infrastructure be built to meet ongoing demand. New and emerging demand is expected. For example, in the short-term an increase of politically motivated bussing during the Democratic National Convention is expected. Long-term, political, climate, or disaster related surges that may occur at any time.

Grasstops leaders in particular offered several possible options to develop permanent and sustainable infrastructure. For instance, each ward can designate a building as a permanent welcoming and resource center to meet the basic needs of various populations. Unfortunate policy decisions, population shifts, and changing social practices have left many empty and unused buildings across Chicago. For instance, the school closures in 2013, mental health clinic shutdowns starting in 2019, and empty archdiocese buildings with diminishing parishioners could now serve newly arriving Chicagoans. These existing structures can be converted into permanent neighborhood welcoming centers that coordinate between services offered by Illinois Welcoming Centers, housing shelters, and other material support centers.

Conclusion

Chicago is facing an unprecedented moment. The convergence of new asylum seekers, uneven post-Covid recovery, and surging homelessness is creating demand for creative, collaborative, emergent, and hopeful problem solving. Community members must be central to these processes.

Much has been learned through this WNLI. It has highlighted how community members are struggling historically and presently. It has also spotlighted the empathy and potential collaborative action and progress that has and can take place within the neighborhood and across communities. More importantly, it has amplified the common experience and needs of our new neighbors and existing and long-term residents. These commonalities speak to a possibility where all people, families, and communities in Chicago can turn a humanitarian struggle into an opportunity to uplift our common humanity.

Struggle can breed growth and positive change, but only if we learn from it. The lessons learned through deep listening to community tell us that there is much possibility for mutual growth and creating a true rising tide that lifts everyone. This collective benefit – of those seeking asylum and those with long-term roots in the city yet still struggling day to day – will only arise with empathy, centering humanity, and true cross-cultural collaboration.

“Trust the people. (If you trust the people, they become trustworthy).”
- adrienne marie brown

Trust in each other and in humanity can seem like a faraway ideal. However, trust is the foundation of strong relationships. It is only through relationships that we can transcend conflict and deep-seated tensions, and grow together. Trust building within and across communities will bolster us in collective action to build permanent infrastructure for mutual aid and shape and advocate for policies that serve us all.

What has happened in Little Village in this time is one example of the polarity in our human response and of the potential for change and growth in our communities, within our city, and across the state. It also acts as a microcosm for what is happening locally and in other sites across the country. We present this study as a learning opportunity for the community as well as a call to action for the city, state, and beyond.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Research Protocols

Community Interview Protocol

1. How do you feel right now about having this conversation, 1-10 (least enthusiastic to most enthusiastic)? Why?
2. What is your opinion about people who are looking for refuge in our community? Why do you feel this way?
3. What changes have you seen in your community? How do you feel about those changes? Why do you think those changes have occurred?
4. What media outlets do you use to stay informed? Do you think they are reliable? Why or why not?
5. How has Little Village been affected by people being received here? Why?
6. Do you think this has been controversial or caused a controversy? Why?
7. What changes could we make with or for the people who are arriving? Why?
8. Do you think Little Village is still a welcoming community? Do you think we should help the people arriving here? Why or why not?
9. What solution do you hope for long term? Why?
10. How are you feeling now after sharing your opinions, 1-10?

Additional Questions for Enlace Staff Interviews

1. What changes have you seen at Enlace Chicago? How do you feel about those changes? Why?
2. What should Enlace do in response to new arrivals to the community? Why?

New Neighbor Interview Protocol

1. How do you feel about participating in this interview/conversation? Why?
2. How have you or your family been welcomed upon arriving in Chicago: services, support, friendships, and connections?
3. What have you learned about your new neighbors in Little Village and Chicago?
4. What do you with they knew about you?
5. What do you hope for in the long-term?
6. How do you feel after sharing your experiences and opinions?

Grasstops Interview Protocol

1. Please introduce yourself and explain how your community and/or organization has been impacted by new refugee seekers from Venezuela.
2. How did you community/organization respond to the issue? Why did you respond that way?
    a. How did funding, partnerships, or other external factors contribute to those decisions?
    b. How did organizational or internal community knowledge contribute to those decisions?
3. What has been the response of community residents to new arrivals?
    a. How has community response been gauged or gathered?
    b. Why do you believe that residents have responded in this way?
4. What have been some positive community outcomes because of the interventions and reactions taken?
5. What are some lessons learned? What do you wish had been done differently, or should have done differently if/when this occurs again?
6. Anything else to share?

Appendix B: Findings Tables

Table 3. Community Interview Professions and Ages Counts

Profession	18-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60+	TOTAL
Building Maintenance			1		1	**2**
Community Social Service	1				1	**2**
Education	3	7	3	1		**14**
Food Hospitality		1	1	2		**4**
Healthcare Support*	2		2	6		**10**
Healthcare Technicians	1				1	**2**
Installation Repair			1			**1**
Management		2		1		**3**
Office, Clerical		1				**1**
Personal Care Service			3	1		**4**
Production		2	8	3	1	**14**
Protective Security			2	1		**3**
Retired					2	**2**
Sales, Business**		2	4	3	1	**10**
Stay at Home	1	8	16	10	8	**43**
Student	7	1				**8**
Transportation				1	1	**2**
Employed	1			1		**2**
N/A	6	4	3	1	2	**16**
TOTAL	**22**	**28**	**44**	**31**	**18**	**143**

* Includes Community Health Workers
** Includes Street Vendors

Table 4. Community Interview Professions and Gender

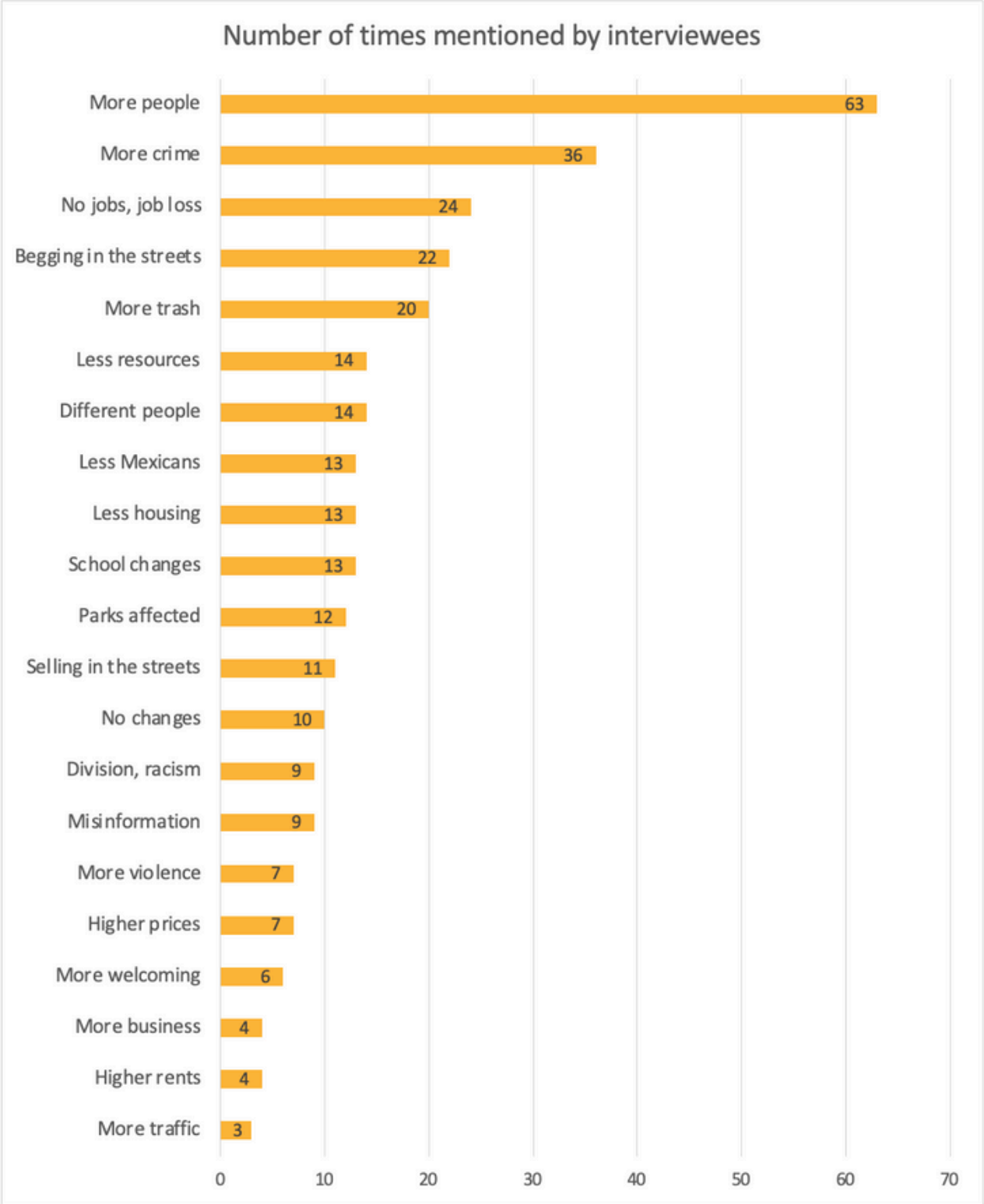
Profession	Female	Male
Building Maintenance	0	2
Community Social Service	2	0
Education	13	1
Food Hospitality	1	3
Healthcare Support	9	1
Healthcare Technicians	1	1
Installation Repair	0	1
Management	1	2
Office, Clerical	0	1
Personal Care Service	4	0
Production	9	5
Protective Security	2	1
Retired	1	1
Sales, Business	8	2
Stay at Home	43	0
Student	5	3
Transportation	0	2
Unemployed	0	2
N/A	0	0
	99	28

*16 interview respondents did not indicate gender

Table 5. Community Interview Professions and Response Types

Profession	Mixed	Negative	Positive
Building Maintenance	0	0	2
Community Social Service	2	0	0
Education	4	4	6
Food Hospitality	1	3	0
Healthcare Support	7	1	2
Healthcare Technicians	0	1	1
Installation Repair	1	0	0
Management	0	0	3
Office, Clerical	1	0	0
Personal Care Service	2	0	2
Production	6	8	0
Protective Security	2	1	0
Retired	0	0	2
Sales, Business	4	4	2
Stay at Home	21	15	7
Student	3	0	5
Transportation	1	1	0
Unemployed	0	1	1
N/A	2	7	7
	57	46	40

Figure 7. Community Interview Changes in Little Village



Appendix C: Grasstops Interview Participants

Patrick Brosnan, Executive Director, Brighton Park Neighborhood Council.

Mario Garcia, Executive Director, Onward House.

Andre Gordillo, Director of New Vecinos, New Life Centers.

Cesar Nuñez, Co-Executive Director, Enlace Chicago.

Marcela Rodriguez, Co-Executive Director, Enlace Chicago.

Alderperson Mike Rodriguez, City of Chicago, 22nd Ward.

Stephanie Willding, MPA, Chief Executive Officer, Community Health.

Illinois State Senator Celina Villanueva, Illinois State Senate, 12th District.