

El Encuentrolero

EDITION 6 * SUMMER 2022 * COMBINING THE BEST OF TWO WORLDS

Letter from our
Executive Director
Andrea Plaza

Our Mission

Encuentro's mission is to transform New Mexico into a thriving community for all of its residents by engaging with Latino immigrant families in education and career development opportunities that build skills for economic and social justice.

To support Encuentro's mission, fuel educational and career opportunities for immigrant adults, or the purchase of a new home, GIVE TODAY.

Make your donation at encuentronm.org

Albert Einstein once said, “the measure of intelligence is the ability to change,” and I believe this is a fitting way to describe Encuentro’s staff, teachers and students!

COVID has definitely awakened our sometimes-sleepy awareness that change is always happening in our daily lives; and Encuentro has always had its ears to the ground, well before COVID, listening and responding to the changing and growing needs of our immigrant community. Responding to change has been

our recipe for success, even in—if not especially in—the most challenging of times.

Over the past 2½ years, Encuentro’s staff has led innovations in online skill-building for Spanish-speaking adult learners, finding a silver lining after the sudden closure of classes, to teach essential digital literacy skills during the continuing pandemic. As we look ahead to the launch of Encuentro’s lucky year number 13, we continue adapting and preparing for the needs

of a continuously changing world. Today, thanks to vaccinations and masking, we can come together in-person more safely; yet at the same time, Encuentro will hold fast to our commitment to narrowing the digital divide that continues affecting immigrants more than any other demographic in our country.

In this edition, you’ll learn more about Encuentro’s preparations to launch a Blended Learning Model in fall 2023. This model will leverage the best of two strategies—learning together in-person and online instruction—to keep pace with valuable technological advancements. And, we’ll be doing it all from our new building, thanks to *YOUR* generous love and support!

We are all intelligent together when we bear witness to, engage with, and support our collective change. *Gracias!*



Adapting to New Learning Pathways

By Teresa Guevara, Director of Educational Programs



Building the long-term and deep relationships that are core to Encuentro's educational approach.

An important lesson that we have learned from teaching online is that although it is possible to challenge the digital divide and build digital literacy skills through our online courses, what is more difficult, is building the long-term and deep relationships that are core to Encuentro's educational approach. Community building is vital for immigrant families. This is why, when we move into our new building, we aim to combine the best of both worlds – online teaching and in-person learning- so that our students benefit from both models.

Blended learning combines in-person and online instruction in a variety of ways, where both components reinforce each other. This learning approach has many benefits for our learners, including the possibility to extend learning outside of face-to-face classes or tutorials, differentiate instruction, offer alternatives to reach unserved learners and build digital literacy, and online learning skills while fostering social interaction.

Next year, Encuentro will pilot the implementation of blended learning in combination with online courses. With this goal in mind, teachers and staff will engage in professional development over the summer to be ready to welcome students to new learning opportunities, a new academic year, and a new home. 🌟



Verónica and her family after being recognized as the Teacher of the Year at Encuentro's 2019 Share the Love.

STAFF SPOTLIGHT

“Vero opened the doors of technology for me and thanks to her, I was able to fill out my online application for college. I am now a college student at CNM pursuing my GED.”

—Maria Lastiri, 2022 entry-level computer student

Meet Verónica Salazar. She was born in Mexico City where she graduated as a Systems Analyst Programmer. In 2002, she immigrated to the United States. Her journey at Encuentro began in 2010 as a part-time computer instructor. Her leadership skills, dedication, and technology expertise led her to join the Education team as an administrative assistant in 2018. Her love of teaching and commitment to her students, make her one of Encuentro's most beloved teachers today!

Verónica was instrumental to Encuentro's transition to online learning back in 2020 when COVID hit. She took the lead to design and deliver technology onboarding, recording Spanish-language instructional videos, and creating detailed manuals to support students and facilitate a smooth transition to online classes.

Vero, as she likes to be called, continues to be the key person responsible for the design and delivery of the technology onboarding, and the launching/operationalization of the computer lab in our new building. She supports capacity-building activities that strengthen digital literacy across the 15 online courses that comprise Encuentro's Adult Basic Education to Careers Pathways.

“I believe in collective transformation and breaking down the barriers of technology. My goal is to build and learn more on a personal and professional level to continue helping my community,” says Vero. 🌟

Did you know?

ENCUENTRO'S NEW ONSITE COMPUTER LAB...

- ★ will house at least 18 computers.
- ★ offers opportunities for in-person and online classes and independent digital skill-building.
- ★ provides real-time Spanish-language technical assistance and troubleshooting.



Juana Santos received her Certificate of Completion in May, 2022.

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

In 2014, Juana Santos immigrated to New Mexico from Peru. Her desire to learn English brought her to Encuentro in 2017. When Encuentro transitioned classes from in person to online in 2020, she was very nervous.

“In the beginning, I only wanted to learn English to have conversations at the supermarket and with my doctor,” Juanita said. “The only technology that I used was my cell phone and my daughter helped me with that. I wanted to give up! I only had elementary education in Peru. I wondered ‘how can I, a 76-year-old woman, take online classes?’ I had never turned on a computer in my life.”

Fortunately, Juanita didn’t give up. Together with her classmates and teachers she took one step at a time and received plenty of support along the way. “Never in a million years would I have imagined being a student in the United States. Continuing to learn has been the best decision I ever made. I bought a computer to take classes online and technology skills made me reborn. I have discovered a new world which has allowed me to do many things independently. Now I can communicate with my son in Peru via zoom without help.” 🌟



Learning and Planning Together

As part of its plan to transition into the new building and new learning model, Encuentro staff and board members participated in a retreat in May to take a step back from the day-to-day work and spend some time thinking strategically about the bigger picture.

We set new goals and made plans for the transition to a blended learning model for all of our students.

Encuentro is ready to move its work forward in powerful ways!



Our Staff

- Crimilda Andrade**
Administrative Assistant
- Brook Bernini**
Training and Employment Coordinator
- Fiore Aragón**
Leadership Development Fellow
- Norma Casas**
Pathways Navigator
- Julia Cusatis**
Development Director
- Fernando Flores**
Home Health Aide Assistant
- Felipe Duran**
Education Associate
- Ilse Grijalva-Lastiri**
Communications
- Teresa Guevara**
Education Director
- Iliana López**
Education Coordinator
- Mayte López**
Home Health Coordinator
- Samanta Morales**
Home Health Aide Director
- Andrea Plaza**
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- Verónica Salazar**
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