



Education Story Leadership Training Empowers Local Parents

Prior to last school year, Luisa Valadez, a seven-year resident of Brighton Park, spent her days as a housewife, caring for her three children and home. Some days when her older children returned from school and asked her how her day was, **she became frustrated that she had little to share.**

"Sometimes, I felt like I can do nothing. [What am I] here for? What can I do?" said Luisa, reflecting on the past. "And in the night, when the day is done, I didn't do anything."

“We don't know all the things we can do...when this program came to my life, everything changed.”

—Luisa Valadez, Brighton Park Mom

After talking to a friend, Luisa was invited to join a parent-mentorship program. Though at first hesitant, Luisa opted to give it a try.

Through our Neighborhood Network Initiative, we support the Brighton Park Neighborhood Council as they train parents to work alongside teachers in local classrooms. In this way, they play a more active role in their children's education.

"Parent leadership programs are a great way for parents to get to know each other and to get more involved in their community," said Jessica Lucas, a senior program manager with United Way of Metro Chicago. "It gives parents a voice and the confidence to speak up for their children and advocate for them within the school system and their communities."

The benefits of the program are felt throughout the community. "Parents and teachers working together is probably the best formula for student success," said Richard Morris, principal of Burroughs Elementary School.

A year since her training, Luisa has seen significant personal growth. The parent leadership program not only increased her self-confidence, it's motivated her to return to school to earn her GED.

"Mothers like me, we always think that we were made to be home, to clean the house, to make dinner, and do laundry. We don't know all the things we can do," Luisa said. "When this program came to my life, everything changed." ■

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