

Hispanic Information Center, Our History

1972- The Catholic Information Center (later and still known as the Hispanic Information Center) of Passaic was founded in 1972 by local Hispanic residents who felt the need for an organization to welcome, orient and advocate for Hispanic immigrants settling in their community. They approached their pastor, the Rev. Daniel Noonan of St. Nicholas Church. Under the leadership of Rev. Noonan a Board of Directors was formed and incorporated. A store front space was rented on 205 Madison St., corner of Hoover Avenue in Passaic. Fr. Dan became the Center's first Director. Through his advocacy many resources were obtained including donated office furniture and typewriters from Hoffman-La-Roche in Nutley, and New Jersey Bell (A note of interest, steel cabinets from La Roche's donation are currently utilized to store packaged goods at the Center's Food Pantry). The rent of \$100.00 per month was paid by the individual and personal contribution of each founding member until fund raising events began to take place to help meet various expenses. On Sunday, September 8, 1972, with the presence of Bishop Lawrence B. Casey of the Paterson Diocese, the Mayor of Passaic Gerald Goldman, city officials and community representatives, the Center was dedicated. On Monday, September 9, 1972, the Center's doors were opened and the Community Services Program began coordinated by Ms. Haydee Martinez, Co-Founder, and first Community Worker who pioneered the Center's spirit s of service to the most vulnerable. In the ensuing years the Community Services Program expanded its services to include rental & utility assistance, free eye exam on a monthly by the New Jersey Commission for the Blind, weekly health screening in partnership with St. Mary's Hospital, case management, job and apartment search, advocacy and advocating with city, state, and county offices for people in a variety of needs and crisis situations.

1975-At the request of city and school officials the Center's Board of Directors met to discuss the need for a resource to help Latino young people whose behaviors often led them to fail in school, be truant and get in trouble with the police. The meetings resulted in a plan to apply for grant to establish a project to meet youth service needs. In July of 1975 a grant of \$17,500 was obtained from the State Department of Community Affairs to open a program for Juveniles in Need of Supervision (JINS). A second store front space was rented two doors away from the Center's main office to house the new program, which consisted of a Supervisor and three part-time Youth Out Reach Workers who proceeded to visit local schools, law enforcement representatives, city and county courts to solicit referrals of any youth who would be considered a candidate for the JINS Program. Program staff would assist youth by representing and speaking on their behalf with school, police and court officials, and offering the JINS Program as a resource for tutoring and guidance, or as an alternative to the Youth Detention Center. Based on the fact that the JINS Program Supervisor left to become self-employed, the Board of Directors hired, on 12/8/75, hired Lorenzo Hernandez to fill the vacancy. Program workers Cesar Murphy and Carmen Sanchez were genuine in their interest to establish communication with great success with the teens referred to the program, to a point where teens would encourage their peers to volunteer in joining the program. By the end of its first year the JINS Program assisted 78 youth, surpassing its level of

service of 38.

1976 - In June of this year Father Daniel Noonan was transferred from St. Nicholas Church to St. Joseph's Church in Paterson, and had to resign as the Center's Director. In September of the same year the Board of Directors, at Father's Noonan recommendation, named Lorenzo Hernandez as the new Director for the Center. In November of 76 the offices of the Community Services and JINS Program moved to larger quarters at 270 Passaic St.

1977 – Luciano Cruz who was a founding member of the HIC was appointed supervisor of the JINS program.

1980- In the Month of July, 1980, and in Collaboration with Catholic Family and Community Services headed by Rev. Joseph Chiampaglio (now Msgr.) and assisted by Rev. Robert Vitillo (now Msgr.), the Hispanic Information Center launched to meet one of its historical challenges of service, consisting of meeting head on the re-Location and resettlement of a massive arrival of persons as a result of the Cuban Mariel Boat-lift created by the Castro Regime. Groups of families and individuals who arrived with nothing but the clothes on their backs visited or were referred to the Center for services. The task of meeting, interviewing, assessing and structuring a case for each individual and every family was demanding to say the least. Ms. Haydee Martinez was assigned to the task which she accepted gladly as always, not to mention these were her people of her beloved Cuba. With support of Mr. Hernandez, in a team effort worked to open lines of communication with Cuban Refugee clients for interviews and intake assessment, offering comfort as needed, broke ring with the local agencies and churches for assistance. Under a Mini-Grant of \$15,000 from the Volunteer Office of ACTION at the state level Alexander Ybarra, a longtime volunteer and supporter of the Center, was hired on a part-time and stipend basis, to assist in the resettlement of the Cuban clients. The process of various tasks began to develop from job and apartment search to clothing, furniture, food baskets and toy drives; school registration assistance, and advocacy for health and mental health services to mention a few. Luciano Cruz arranged for Literacy Volunteers of America to provide ESL classes to the refugees two evenings per week. The highlight included a Mass celebrated at the Center to the Cuban Refugees by then Bishop Frank Rodimer of the Diocese of Paterson who gladly accepted to share the mission together with Reverends Ciampaglio and Vitillo who were present at the Mass. The resettlement process was completed in 1985. Some of the Cuban people progressed to enjoy a having a business of their own, permanent jobs, better living quarters or a house of their own in Passaic, out of state, including the State of Florida.

1980- The Catholic Information Center amended its Certificate of Incorporation changing its name from the Catholic Information Center to the Hispanic Information Center of Passaic.

1984 – Luciano Cruz resigned as the Coordinator of the Youth Services (formerly JINS) Program to return to the seminary. Once ordained Fr. Luciano would become a Board member of HIC. Mario Pena was appointed the coordinator of the Youth Services Program following the

resignation of Luciano Cruz.

1985-The Center received a state grant to operate a Host Home (aka Foster Parent) Program based on a request made by the DYFS Northern Regional Office, to study the feasibility of creating a program which would house and care for abused and neglected children. The request was accepted by the Board of Directors through its Exec. Director Mr. Hernandez, who in turn solicited the assistance of Lorenzo Puertas, PH.D, School Psychologist from the Paterson School District. Dr. Puertas accepted to collaborate in the design and proposal of such a project. The goal was to establish a program after the Host Home Model, which were in operation in some areas of New Jersey. It would require the recruitment and training of parents who would be willing to open their hearts and their homes to offer ongoing love and care, room and board, overall care, Including school, and supervision of medical needs for the children 24 hours a day. The parents would be compensated through the grant administered through HIC. It would also require the hiring of a Program Coordinator and Caseworkers, and a series of red tape procedures with the state of New Jersey. On April 1, 1985 a grant for start-up funds was approved to initiate program structure, recruiting and training of both parent and staff. Rosaura Torres was hired as Program Coordinator, assisted by Marla Nunez. A full year contract was approved on July 1, 1985. The Program began with a Level of service of 8 children and five Host parents.

1985- The Hispanic Information Center (Hence forth " HIC") was visited by the City of Passaic Health Officer Milton Milligan, (Deceased) with the concern of the number of Latinos who suffered addiction with no rehabilitation and or treatment program to serve them in their own language. and of the wiliness of many to utilize the services if a program could be established. This information was corroborated by the Intoxicated Drivers Resource Center (IDRC) after consulting and being advised by the Board of Directors, Mr. Hernandez developed and submitted a proposal to Passaic County requesting funds for an Alcohol Service Program. In July 1985 HIC opened an Alcohol Outreach Services Program. Israel Sierra was hired as Alcohol Counselor, and became an advocate for program clients. Dr. Puertas worked out an agreement for referrals with the IDRC Office, implemented a Sixteen Week Treatment Program for every Tuesday of the week. In the program's twenty five years of service a great number of persons were assisted to improve their life style in marriage relations, at their jobs and in general to renew their efforts to become productive citizens.

1986 - Rosaura Torres resigned as the Coordinator of the Foster Parent Program to work with DYFS, and was replaced by Marla Nunez who was her assistant.

1986 – Dilcia Ortega succeeded Mario Pena as Youth Services Program Coordinator.

1986- The great number of elderly clients with a variety of situations calling or visiting the Center for services through the Community Service Program became a motivating factor to seek funds for a senior project. A grant proposal (prepared by Dr. Puertas) was submitted and accepted for an amount of \$35,000 from the Passaic County “Peer Grouping System Revenue Program”. The purpose of the grant was to establish a program to better respond to specific needs and situations,

often unnoticed, being experienced by elderly members of the Latino community. A good number of them were living alone and/or in poor conditions with a series of limitations, including English, to deal with government agencies, official documents and medical needs; many were homebound, with very little or no access to required services. On 7/1/86 the grant became effective, and Delia Ramos was hired for the Position of Homebound Program Coordinator.

1987 The success of the Foster Parent Program led DYFS to increase the LOS from 8 to 15 children.

1988 - Delia Ramos left her Position as Homebound Coordinator on 12/31/88 due to health conditions, and was replaced by Graciela (Shirley) Romero. Over the years other Coordinators for the Program have been: Lourdes Jimenez, (first tenure) Mayra De La Rosa from, and currently with the Community Service Program; Lourdes Matias, Elizabeth Paz, (Deceased) Cynthia Chernes, Lourdes Jimenez (second tenure). In 2011 Lorena Garcia was transferred from the Community Service Program as the Coordinator of the Homebound Program, a Position she currently holds. The Homebound Program, a resource of ongoing support and companionship is on its 27th year of operation, has positively affected the lives of hundreds of its elderly citizens through Bi-Lingual/Bi-Cultural representation with clinics and doctors, city, county and state agencies, promoting independence and prevention of institutionalization. Every year two special luncheons are held on Mother's Day and Christmas, with raffles and gifts. Senior members label the program a haven of joy in their lives.

1988 Due to the continued success of the Foster Parent Program DYFS increased the HIC's level of service to 35 host families.

1990- Dilcia Ortega resigned as Youth Program Coordinator and was replaced by Arelys Hernandez. Arelys mobilized the Program to raised funds to purchase computers, and did outreach for computer donations, set up computer classes for the children. In her ten years tenure Arelys helped the children become aware of civic participation, develop techniques in sports(Tennis) and increased parent involvement and homework assistance at home.

1994- Mary Santiago was hired to replace Graciela (Shirley) Romero when she was transfer to the Community Service Program as Crisis Case Manager for difficult cases. 1994-HIC implemented an Immigration and Citizenship Program attracting over 7500 participants and assisting 3500 persons to attain U.S. Citizenship. The program not only helped the significant Hispanic Population, but also many persons from other ethnic groups, particularly the Polish community.

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1995 In 1995 Foster Parent Program Coordinator Marla Nunez moved to Florida, and on June 5, 1995 the Board hired Maribel Garcia Leon as her replacement.

1995-HIC and The Passaic County Women Shelter established a partnership consisting of a Domestic Violence Counselor being available three day per week to treat persons who report being victims of domestic violence or sexual assault. Clients, numbering 12-16 per month, receive all the required support as applicable including guidance and court representation and all legal procedures through the Women's Center in Paterson. The partnership has been and is ongoing, with the exception of a lower number of cases per month. In its origin, the partnership had the Women Shelter contributing \$175.00 for phone and clerical expenses until the Shelter's grant was discontinued. At the present the partnership continues solely based on the generosity of the Women's Shelter interest in reaching out to Latino/ immigrant members of the community. Needless to say, an endless list of persons have benefitted from the partnership.

1997 HIC received a Sub-Grant of \$427,000 under and from the Hispanic Directors Association of New Jersey overall grant with the Immigration Policy Network of NJ. The Goal: Provide citizenship services to 2200 persons primarily from seven counties in Northern New Jersey. 1500 would be Elderly immigrants and 700 Disabled aliens. Approximately 1900 would be Hispanic and 300 from other ethnic backgrounds. HIC was part of a Consortium of five HDANJ member agencies opening sites to reach 2200 Elderly and Disabled Hispanic Residents who were risk of losing their 551 Benefits unless they became citizens (The 2200 Elderly/Disabled were part of a total universe target population of 24,670 non-citizen recipients of 551). HIC, based on its Immigration & Citizen Program, was involved in the Outreach of the set goals, plus became the Coordinating Agency of Outreach to four other agencies. HIC was delegated by the Houston Community College to provide the standard citizenship examination and the necessary courses on American History, government, and English. The Houston Community College provided HIC the standardized training package including videos, screening exams, books, cassettes, instructional manuals and other educational material to carry out its outreach to Passaic and four other cities covering their areas: Morris County Hispanic Affairs(Dover, Morristown, Parsippany, target population:300); La Casa de Don Pedro(Newark, target population: 500); PROCEED (Elizabeth, target Pop. 400); Puerto Rican Action for Human Development (Perth Amboy and New Brunswick, target Pop.500). HIC, Passaic & Paterson, target Pop. 500.) each member agency received their own funding, hired an Outreach Worker to inform their communities and coordinate citizenship class sites. HIC's citizenship classes were provided at St. Anthony's Church Hall in Passaic and was responsible for the citizenship course team who would visit each of the mentioned sites to deliver the citizenship courses each day on a weekly basis. HIC and the other four agencies were successful in carrying out their set goals by 1999.

1998-In June of 1998 HIC expanded the Host Home Program to the Hudson County Regional Office area at the request of the DYFS state office based on the success of the program. The HIC Board of Director's studied and approved the move. An Annex to the budget was created for the additional funds from Hudson. The Contract consisted of a level of service of ten beds, and the

hiring of appropriate staff. Deanna Velasquez was promoted from her Position of Youth Program Coordinator in Passaic to Senior Case Manager of the Hudson Program, and Karina Maria was hired as her Case Worker. When Deanna Velasquez left to follow a teaching career, Karina Maria filled her vacancy as Senior Case Manager.

2000 In July of 2000 after year long negotiations between Joseph Duffy the Executive Secretary for Catholic Charities in the Diocese of Paterson and Lorenzo Hernandez, the Executive Director of the Hispanic Information Center the Board of Trustees of HIC approved the reincorporation of the HIC making it the sixth Catholic Charities Agency in the Diocese of Paterson.

2000 - Haydee Martinez, one of the founders of the HIC retired and relocated to Florida.

2000 - HIC was invited as a community based organization to enter into a partnership with the Passaic Public Schools to be part of a Consortium and recipient of a sub-grant as a result of a major grant by The Passaic Board of Education with the "State 21st. Century Community Learning Centers Program" under the State Board of Education. The Grant was given the Home Title of "Quality of Life", consisting of several schools offering after school tutoring, counseling, nutritional, fitness and recreational services to low income children, including those of immigrant families, in the district. The sub-grant of \$15,000, (5% administration costs and supplies) was for HIC to hire a Part-Time Outreach Worker whose duties were to communicate and contact with families in the community informing them of the available resources, inviting and assisting them to register their children in the program, and supervise overall process. Currently the outreach services are no longer required; for the last eight years "The Quality of Life Program" presently consists of a mini-grant(\$3,808.00) for HIC to provide evening computer classes, from February to June of each year, The Board of Directors hired Arelys Hernandez, for her excellent tech knowledge, as Part-Time Computer Instructor. The goal of the computer classes is to offer the parents of the children in the school district the opportunity to empower themselves in computer skills, and as a result, be instrumental in assisting their children with school work assignments and regular home work. In the last 13 years hundreds of parents have benefitted from the classes.

2002 - In collaboration with the Passaic School District and law enforcement officials with regards to the gang awareness in the community, HIC entered into a grant agreement from the Passaic Board of Education effective January 1, 2002 to December 31,2002. The goal of the Project," IMPACT PASSAIC ": To establish effective working relationships with community organizations, Passaic Juvenile and Probation Department, and residents of the City of Passaic in a collaborative effort to highlight gang awareness and prevention techniques with the general community. The second part was to identify youth and their families who were at high risk and /or already gang inclined or affiliated, and to encourage them to other self-fulfilling life alternatives, educating them in acquiring the tools and life skills needed to prevent violence. The Grant included the hiring of two Outreach Workers, Vanessa Roman and Stephen Cernan. The Outreach

Workers would meet with students during school hours, invite them to a weekly meeting at the Center where they listen to speakers, including police officers, exchange information and initiate dialogue. Youth members would then share games and snacks as means to enhance communication in an atmosphere of trust. The program highlighted in the Passaic Herald News with comments from teens who expressed their appreciation of the program in deviating teens from the risk of gang participation. Throughout the years some teens have become members of HIC Youth Program as an alternative to gang involvement.

2003 - HIC entered into a \$40,000 Sub-Contract with the Hispanic Directors Association of New Jersey (HDANJ) with the purpose of implementing a Pre-School Outreach Program, under a grant with the State Board of Education, and as a consortium member with five other Hispanic community based organizations, with the goal of ensuring that every child, ages 3-4 years of age in an Abbott School District has access quality Early Child Care and Education Services. The Pre-School enrollment goal for HIC was 290 verified enrollments in the City of Passaic as part of an overall commitment of 1500 enrollments throughout the state. HIC hired an Outreach Worker, Peter Cedeno on a Part-Time basis who received the appropriate training for the task under HDANJ. The Outreach Worker would hold evening meetings informing and instructing Latino parents to matriculate their children according to their school district. HIC accomplished its goal by the end of March 31, 2005.

In 2004, Ana Rivera was promoted to Community Services Coordinator to oversee the functions of the community service program and to promote special events.

2005 In 2005, the state, through the regulations under the Office of the Office of Licensing, eliminated the (Foster Parent) Host Home structure and declared all homes as certified to the level of Foster Care or Resource Family Homes, and render periodic reviews as per set standards. The program has been blessed with genuine loving parents, some with over twenty years of service, and the lowest tenure is of 7 years; turnover is at the minimum. Numerous children who could not be returned to their biological parents, via the coordination of the HIC Foster Care Office with DYFS have been placed in adoption with loving and caring parents. Some foster parents have adopted a foster child, some more than one, and another seriously thinking about it soon. The state offices hold the program in great esteem.

2011 The current Youth Program Coordinator is Jomayra Garcia who has been with the Program since 2009, and was named to her present position on July 1, 2011.

2012 On July 1 The HIC was acquired through merger by Catholic Family and Community Services becoming the Hispanic Information Center Division of CFCS.