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# NUESTRA CASA

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*Learn • Grow • Connect*

## SALEM DREAM CENTER – NUESTRA CASA

### What is our project, and what wider community issue/need does it address?

Last year, based on community input and identified need, Salem Dream Center decided to develop a new community center in the heart of Salem's Edgewater Community. Named Nuestra Casa—meaning “Our House” in Spanish—this center is slated to open in March 2016.

A majority of the individuals and families to be served at Nuestra Casa live in poverty. As such, they face myriad health and socioeconomic issues.

Nuestra Casa aims to combat poverty, and all of the downstream negative affects, by creating a community-run, community-accountable space that provides opportunities for personal and professional development.

Individuals will not only have the opportunity to master a new trade, take up a hobby, finish their education, learn a second language or simply seek refuge from the demands of daily life, but they will also have the opportunity to give back. All classes will be volunteer run and offered at no cost. Participants are expected to share their talents and skills with others. This could mean teaching a class, donating time to work in the garden or helping with the remodel project.

Course offerings will include:

Topic Area	Course List
Education	Reading, math, history, GED, Homework Club
Language	English, Spanish, Russian
Literacy	Youth and adult literacy, Children's Story Hour
Vocational Training	Sewing, small engine repair, cooking, welding
Job Skills and Small Business Development	Microsoft Office Suite, resume development, website design, interview skill building, job search support, QuickBooks, budgeting and forecasting business planning
Cooking	Cooking on a budget, canning and preserving, vegetarian cooking, ethnic cooking, nutritional cooking
Exercise	Zumba, yoga, dance
Art	Painting, drawing, pottery, basket weaving
Music	Guitar, drums, violin, keyboard, mandolin voice
Couples/Personal Advancement	Personal/family finance; Fatherhood Program; couples, parenting and single adult workshops; personal/couples counseling, Rent Well, Abriendo Puertas

We will work with community partners to create new economic advancement opportunities. Partners include: Habitat for Humanity, Easter Seals and the ELY and Latino Connection Programs. We will also offer a Small Business Micro Loan Program, which will provide individuals with equipment and supplies to jumpstart their own small business.

### **What hat is the origin and inspiration of the project?**

Founded in 2004, Salem Dream Center is a nonprofit organization that provides education, mentorship and food security support services to youth and families living in poverty.

Since inception, our programs have focused on serving the Edgewater community in West Salem. While one of the wealthiest zip codes in Oregon, this community faces extreme income inequality with 87% of the population living in poverty. A majority of the families we serve have mixed immigration status members. Parents tend to be new immigrants, for whom English is not their first language, and who work low-wage, menial labor jobs. Their children are typically first generation Americans who face myriad challenges growing up in poverty: unstable housing, inadequate nutrition, lack of childcare, limited health care access, unsafe neighborhoods, and under-resourced schools. As such, these children are particularly vulnerable to poor academic achievement, school dropout, abuse and neglect, behavioral and socioemotional problems, physical health problems, and developmental delays. Our programs, including Nuestra Casa, seek to address many of these issues.

### **Who will help put the project strategy into action?**

Our team consists of Craig Oviatt, our Executive Director and Renee Oviatt, our Program Director. Krizti Caraway our Program Coordinator to oversee day-to-day operations. Our board of directors, dozens of volunteers and community partners are also helping us with project strategic planning and execution.

### **Who do you serve and how will this new project benefit them?**

Nuestra Casa will serve children (0-18 years old) and families (of all ages) in Salem's Edgewater community, and beyond. A majority will live in poverty and suffer from food insecurity, illiteracy and low educational attainment. On average, we expect to reach 1,200 individuals annually.

Overall, Nuestra Casa will benefit the community by providing new, sustainable opportunities for personal and professional development. We will not only teach a new skill or trade, but also provide the opportunity for that skill or trade to be put into practice. This model will promote personal advancement which will have profound impacts on a family and the larger community.

Here's an example:

*Juana, a single mother of two children, chooses to enroll in the sewing vocational training course. She adds the "entrepreneurial package" where she is able to also complete courses in small business development, QuickBooks, budgeting and forecasting, website design and Microsoft Office. After completing the courses, she has a business plan, LLC and website that she developed for her own small sewing business, which she plans to operate out of her home so she can be there when her kids come home from school. Next, she is assisted by a Nuestra Casa volunteer in establishing her own LLC. And, Through the Small Business Micro Loan Program, she receives a sewing machine laptop, a QuickBooks license and an account at a local fabric company. Juana pays back the micro loan by teaching sewing and small business management courses at Nuestra Casa.*

**What outcomes will we use to demonstrate success? How will we ensure that the project is sustainable?**

Nuestra Casa will be successful if we are able to realize strong community engagement in operations and programming. Anticipated outcomes include:

- Participants develop the skills needed to advance personally and professionally, leading to better educational outcomes and improved economic conditions.
- Particularly among the youth we serve, decreases in drug and alcohol use, criminal behavior and school drop out rates.
- Increase the resilience of the Edgewater community; youth and adults are surrounded with strong peer support.
- Meaningful, positive relationships are formed, leading to community action and transformation.

In an attempt to more formally measure and report on the impact of our programs, we recently developed a participant survey. Overtime, we will use survey results to not only measure success, but to also understand the areas where we might improve in order to remain responsive to community needs.

Nuestra Casa is being designed with sustainability in mind. Examples include:

- All of the labor, supplies, plants and seeds for our community garden were donated from community partners in the Salem area.
- We have a new partnership with the Marion-Polk Food Share's Seed to Supper Program. They will be providing classes on gardening, healthful cooking, canning and preserving at no-cost to us.
- A major supporter generously leased us the house where Nuestra Casa is located for only \$1/month for the next ten years.
- Stone Construction, who will be performing the house remodel, not only heavily discounted the cost, but will be pitching Nuestra Casa to the NW Homebuilders Association, which could mean they donate the entire remodel.
- Mountain West Investments have also expresses a desire to be part of the creation of Nuestra Casa.
- The Bitikofer family have pledged up to \$30,000 toward the creation of Nuestra Casa