

Positive Impact Awards

Name: Luis Gutierrez

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Select a category:

Community Revitalization: Commitment to developing programs for the betterment of youth, environment, education and social issues

Please describe in detail your nominee's specific accomplishment and what was involved in achieving it. Be sure to include the dates of the activities.

Luis Gutierrez founded Latinos Progresando with just \$200 in 1998, and has spent the last 19 years serving immigrant families in the largest Mexican community in the Midwest. In the first days, without recognition or pay, Luis helped clients complete the process to become US citizens. In 2001, with his first staff hire, Latinos Progresando began an initiative to provide free legal services for immigrant victims of domestic violence.

Today, under Luis' leadership, Latinos Progresando has developed the largest Latino-led immigration legal services clinic in the State of Illinois, with a reputation for high quality; Teatro Americano, a youth theater company that celebrates culture while building academic and life skills; and provides college scholarships to determined immigrant students. In 2010, Luis expanded Latinos Progresando's work to build and lead a coalition of 30 neighborhood organizations called the Marshall Square Resource Network, through which he coordinates capacity building opportunities for member agencies, with the broader goal to facilitate advanced, collaborative solutions in health, education, and peace on Chicago's southwest side.

For his accomplishments, Luis was appointed to the VP of Diversity on the Executive Committee of the Board of Directors of the ACLU of Illinois (where has served as a board member since 2014); was selected for a Latino-Jewish delegation to Israel with the American Jewish Committee (2016); was named to the Chicago Mayor's Office of New Americans Advisory Council (2012); and has received numerous awards, including MALDEF's Excellence in Community Service Award (2011).

Please describe their impact, potential impact and how they have inspired others.

Under Luis's leadership, Latinos Progresando delivers high quality information and resources for people to build secure, healthy and productive lives.

Through the immigration legal services program that Luis started in 1998, thousands of immigrants from 40 countries around the world have been equipped with the tools they need to achieve economic security through the ability to work legally within the United States and pursue public benefits, peace of mind that their families will stay together, and the ability to become civically engaged.

Through Teatro Americano, hundreds of youth and their families have increased access to relevant arts programming, and the ability to tell stories they choose, promoting positive self-imagery and celebrating history and culture.

Through the Dr. Angela Perez Miller Scholarship, dozens of immigrant students have received financial assistance to successfully pursue postsecondary education.

Through the Marshall Square Resource Network, thousands of community residents each year have been connected to high quality resources in a variety of fields within their own neighborhood; Luis's work with the Marshall Square Resource Network ensures the provision of resources that meet immigrant families' holistic needs in the areas of peace, health, and education.

Further, nonprofit professionals in those member agencies have been given access to ongoing professional development opportunities.

Please describe the moment or situation that motivated your nominee to take action.

In the early 1990s, at the urging of a friend, Luis volunteered at a citizenship workshop that would become the catalyst for his nonprofit career. Before that day, he had never participated in community service, but that first experience was so transformative that it inspired Luis to dedicate his life's work to revitalizing his community.

That experience, and his early work in nonprofit, motivated Luis to build an organization that prioritized strong organizational capacity and leadership skills, with the understanding that sustainable community change is not possible without sustainable community organizations.

Please describe those characteristics that set your nominee apart from others

In word and in practice, Luis has maintained his commitment to put the needs of the community ahead of his own recognition or personal gain.

Luis has also set a standard of high quality and high expectations that has led to Latinos Progresando's success, but has also contributed to the nonprofit sector by developing skilled professionals, and in increasing the capacity of partner organizations. Luis is never willing to compromise quality--the attitude "that's good enough" is not good enough for his community, a value that he instills in everyone he meets.

Although his role as CEO often makes him the public face of the organization, the work he considers most impactful happens behind the scenes. He continuously provides opportunities for people in whom he sees great potential for leadership to step up and take the reins on a specific project, and has, in effect institutionalized the notion that the best leaders are not necessarily those who speak the loudest. Luis invests time in mentorship and opens opportunities for those not often given leadership roles to take on rewarding development opportunities.

He is someone who recognizes the importance of every person who commits to community revitalization and cultivates leadership in others, while keeping his team focused on their shared goals. While he is often the public representative of the work that is being done in his community, he is constantly striving to encourage people who do not often get leadership opportunities into taking on challenging and rewarding leadership roles, as he recognizes that while the credit often goes to the person on the screen, it is often the person on the ground who is the most important leader.

Please describe the impact that recognition will have on your nominee, their cause, and those they help.

Recognition from the Positive Impact Awards will expose a broader audience to the hard work being done to address the issues faced by families on Chicago's southwest side, and by immigrant families all over the world.

Being recognized for the Positive Impact Awards will hopefully engage Prudential's audience in Latinos Progresando's mission to provide high quality information and resources for people to build secure, healthy and productive

lives, and hopefully inspire those in organizations throughout the country to adopt a collaborative spirit.

If you would like to share any websites or online articles about your nominee's activities, please enter up to 3 links here.

“Little Village Neighborhood Network Partners Work to Address Trauma”:

https://uw-mc.org/little-village-neighborhood-network-partners-work-address-trauma/?doing_wp_cron=1485452647.0220320224761962890625

“Plans for Little Village rails-to-trail project discussed at community meeting”:

<http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-little-village-rails-to-trails-met-20160317-story.html>

“Latinos Progresando: Heroes”:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aut54fcBWVU>