

Community Partnerships

Taking Action for Health Equity

Buenos Vecinos



In 2014, the Washtenaw County Health Department partnered with a Latino community organization called Casa Latina and the University Of Michigan School Of Public Health to administer a survey to Latino residents across Washtenaw County. The purpose of the project was to both assess and improve the health, well-being, social support and social capital of this population. The survey was titled Encuesta Buenos Vecinos (EBV), meaning survey of good neighbors.

The EBV was needed because standard public health assessment tools were not adequately reaching a growing Latino population. The EBV was developed, administered and analyzed by community members. Results have been utilized during the past five years in numerous Latino serving organizations throughout the County. The EBV Community Leadership Team (CLT) continues its work and vision today: “To promote resilient Latinx leadership and powerful connections across Washtenaw County by igniting ideas, strengthening trust, and building relationships.”

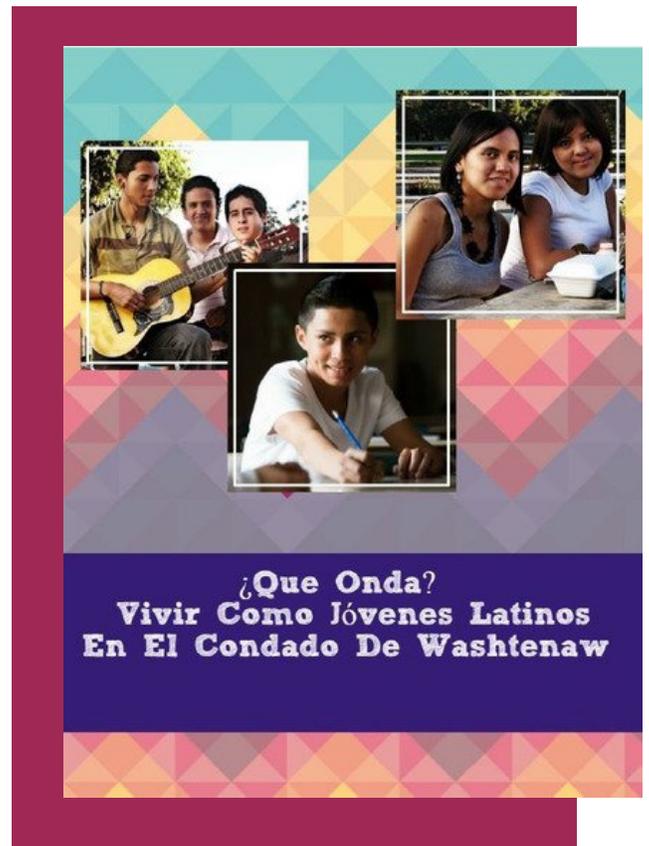
[Explore EBV data online at healthsurveys.ewashtenaw.org.](https://healthsurveys.ewashtenaw.org)



Jovenes Tejedores de Sociedad

In 2015, the EBV CLT identified ten priority issues for the Latino community. One in particular, high school graduation, was the first order of business. CLT members spent hours listening to the concerns and challenges of the Ypsilanti middle and high school Latino students. We learned that discrimination was the number one challenge. This discrimination made students feel both targeted and invisible, often worse so if they were foreign born or English as second language (ESL) learners.

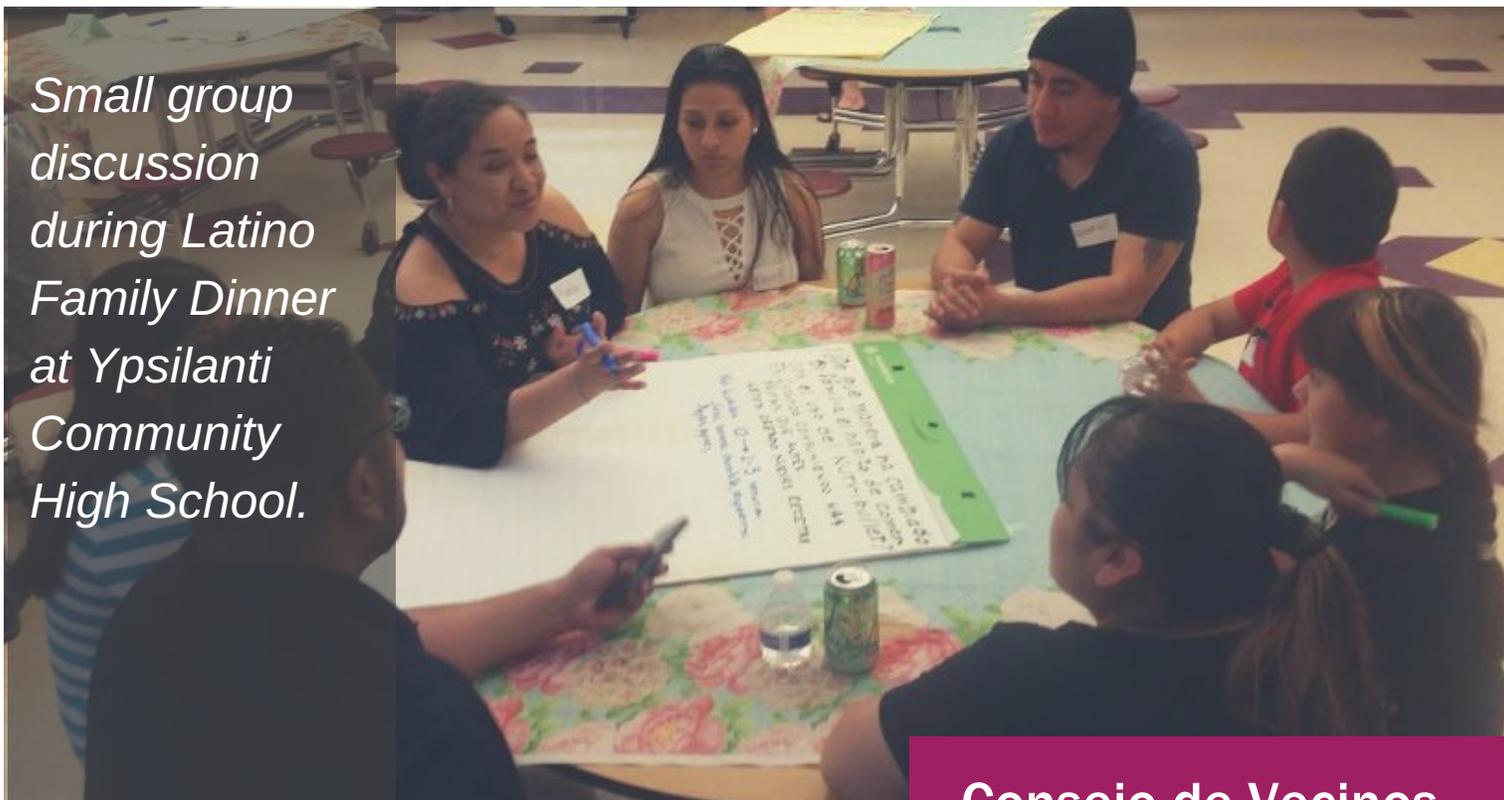
The CLT began a project focused on working with these youth at Ypsilanti Community High School. The project was named Jovenes Tejedores de Sociedad (Youth Weavers of Society), or JTS. JTS has been focused on increasing hope, health and high school graduation. Ypsilanti Community High School ESL teacher, Liz Sirman, continues to provide the class time, venue, opportunity and partnership on this project. In 2017, we completed a [report called "Despierta,"](#) which summarizes the health and well-being challenges that many Washtenaw County youth and young adults face into 15 sections, including bullying, employment, substance abuse, healthy relationships and mental health.



“The ¡Despierta! Report gives a voice to our Latino youth in Washtenaw County. Adolescents often feel disempowered and without a voice this reports highlights some of the issues they may be facing. There is no better investment in the future than empowering our youth.”

- Mikel Llanes, Buenos Vecinos Community Leadership Team Member

Small group discussion during Latino Family Dinner at Ypsilanti Community High School.



Consejo de Vecinos

One core aspect of the JTS is connection with parents. Washtenaw County Latino parents identify significant challenges in having adequate time with their children, involvement in their children's extracurricular activities, and especially communicating with teachers and the school system. During 2017 and 2018, CLT members arranged home visits to the parents of the JTS students. In these home visits, we had discussions about the challenges in providing healthy foods in their homes.

"We have a good group of Latino families to get together, but nobody is from my neighborhood because I've lived here for 5 years and don't know anybody."

-EBV participant

The home visits revealed the significant difficulties and obstacles that these families share regarding not just healthy eating, but also lack of time and mostly social connection with other Latino neighbors. As a result, we initiated the Consejo de Vecinos, meaning council of neighbors. The Consejo kicked off with a family dinner event at Ypsilanti Community High School. The event included presentations on the history of Buenos Vecinos and Latino community health issues, as well as small group discussions regarding these health issues, smoothie demonstrations, and games for youth.

The Consejo has since met to hear guest speakers talk about immigration, access to health insurance, and general legal questions. The members describe additional issues that they need assistance with, including the need for drivers licenses and how to navigate school systems, including assisting their college bound youth with applications for schools and financial aid.

Resilience

As we move forward with Jovenes Tejedores, we will build on the social-emotional learning curriculum, with an emphasis on continuing to build youth resiliency. Some young people have experienced significant trauma on their journey to the U.S., as well as significant academic and parental involvement challenges resulting from English as a second language, limited family income, being immersed in a foreign cultural, and immigration-related biases. However, the JTS youth have developed strengths, experience, and coping skills because of the daily courage with which they live.

We are also looking forward to creating opportunities for Latino high school students to mentoring those in middle school in developing resilience, hope, and health in reaching high school graduation and beyond.

“I’m very glad you do this to help families and parents, because I suffered and survived all the barriers that my parents had to overcome.”

-EBV participant

If you would like to learn more about Buenos Vecinos and support their work, please contact Charo at charo.ledon@gmail.com.

[Explore Encuesta Buenos Vecinos data online at healthsurveys.ewashtenaw.org](http://healthsurveys.ewashtenaw.org).

