Empoderando Padres

A community organising scheme that serves local Latinx parents in Lambeth and Southwark run by King’s College London in partnership with Citizens UK

Latinx refers to a person of Latin American origin or descent and is used as a gender-neutral or non-binary alternative to Latino or Latina.

London and the UK have a large and vibrant Latinx community. A recent study estimates that there are around 250,000 people of Latinx descent in the UK, forming the eighth largest ethnic community. A third of Latinx people in the UK do not speak English and therefore face challenges in the processes of inclusion and integration. Over half of Latinx people in the UK live in London, with the majority based in King’s College London’s local boroughs of Lambeth and Southwark.

Empoderando Padres was established after Liliana Torres, an active participant of Parent Power, proposed a bespoke Spanish-language programme to serve the local Latinx community in Lambeth and Southwark after noticing she was the only Latinx parent in the group. Empoderando Padres has engaged over 40 underrepresented parents, recruiting 8 as local parent leaders. It is an active and restless network of parents striving to gain a greater understanding of the English education system so that they can better support and guide their children.

Empoderando Padres aims to create a space for Latinx parents to speak, fight and win on issues that matter to them, such as education and security for their families, status, housing and, most pressing of all, representation. Lack of recognition as an ethnic minority has led to perpetual invisibility of the community in service design and provision, reinforcing existing inequalities in education and beyond.

Empoderando padres y ¡Vaya que son súper poderosos!
Campaigning for Latinx Representation

Widening Participation teams have known little about the representation of Latinx student in higher education because UK-based Latinx students have had to apply through UCAS selecting code 80: ‘Other ethnic background’. This means that the eighth biggest minority community in London are unable to identify as a specific ethnic group, which hinders the development of a stable Latinx identity and sense of belonging in the education system. It also means that the evidence base relating to the Latinx community in education is poor.

King’s and Citizens UK are committed to working with the Empoderando Padres group and the inspiring young women of LatinXcluded, who brought this issue to our attention. Not only is King’s the first university to officially recognise Latinx applicants, we have committed to taking institutional action on Latinx staff and student representation through inclusion in our Race Equality Action Plan.

To raise greater awareness of this issue, King’s hosted the launch of the Latin Education Network in November 2019 which brought together people from the Latinx community, community organisations, universities and other educational groups. This event also served as the launch of a new report commissioned by King’s into Latinx representation, engagement and participation, as well as the official launch of Empoderando Padres.

King’s work with Citizens UK and the Latinx community aims to provide hope of a better future for young Latinx people who feel they have, thus far, been invisible.

‘They call us “the invisibles”, los invisibles. The grinding reality of being Latin American in the UK has made invisibility a new custom for our community, one that is hard to escape.’ – Paulina Tamborrel Signoret, Community organiser for Greenwich, Lambeth and Diaspora communities in the UK, Citizens UK

Related publications

- Alix Robertson, Dr Sam Baars and Kate Bowen-Viner, ‘Representation, engagement and participation: Latinx students in higher education’, Report by LKMc, commissioned by King’s College London’s Widening Participation Department, 20 November 2019

Empowering parents during COVID-19

There are fears that the COVID-19 pandemic will disproportionately impact the education outcomes of minority communities. To try and combat this, the Empoderando Padres meetings were quickly moved online by members of the King’s Widening Participation team and community organisers to ensure that the parents continued to be supported.

These weekly virtual Empoderando Padres meetings aim to connect Spanish-speaking parents, supporting them with their children’s education and maintaining a sense of community. As well as taking part in short sessions about the UK education system and community organising, parents have been able to speak about how lockdown is affecting them and their children. The parents have also been given the opportunity to lead sessions and share their knowledge, helping to develop them as community leaders. Parent-led sessions have included campaigning for a Parent Commissioner for London, maintaining wellbeing, tackling anxiety, emotional dependence and setting healthy boundaries, the psychology of young people and how to build a successful project. Empoderando Padres has also taken a leading role in a local campaign to bridge education inequalities by providing laptops to young people who cannot afford them and do not qualify for government schemes and support.
Members of King’s Widening Participation team and community organisers have closely supported the parents in this transition to “moving” online by not assuming that everyone knows how to connect and interact digitally. During the first meeting, tech support and instructions on using digital platforms were provided in Spanish. This additional support has not only been useful for the purposes of the Empoderando Padres initiative but also in ensuring parents can help with their children’s online-schooling.

Testimonials

‘Buenas tardes en mi opinión este lockdown el hecho de reunirnos semanalmente nos permitió conocernos y acariciar el alma del otro “con el uno a uno” de Paulina, nos permitió imaginar, y valorar nuestros conocimientos y aquellos que nos apoyaron en la vida “con la pregunta del día” de Jacky, nos instruyó en la búsqueda, el equilibrio de la info y los recursos de IT con Ana M; disfrutamos de las charlas, la sesión de meditación, la práctica de redacción, y cada uno de los aportes de acuerdo a las habilidades de cada participante en una palabra avanzamos meses en el tiempo “creando un tejido social empático que es capaz de retroalimentarse, solidarizarse y estar abierto a nuevos retos” – Martha Cadena, Empoderando Padres Leader

English translation: ‘In my opinion, during this lockdown, being able to gather as a group has allowed us to get to know each other and recognise each others’ souls. With the 121s, we were allowed to imagine and value the knowledge we have gathered through life and the people that have been there for us. With the rounds, we have learned how to find answers within ourselves and balance what we say. With the IT support, we have been able to participate and enjoy the conversations, learn from others about meditation, writing and more. In short, we have grown months in just a few weeks. We have weaved a fabric of empathy and are able to give each other feedback, solidarity and new challenges.’

‘Sin importar la distancia, el grupo Empoderando Padres ha seguido trabajando y fortaleciéndose. Nos sentimos animadas y motivadas para seguir trabajando juntas, seguir aprendiendo juntas y acompañándonos en estos momentos raros y difíciles.’ – Ana Maria, Empoderando Padres Leader

English translation: ‘No matter the distance, the Empoderando Padres group has kept working and growing stronger. We are motivated and cheerful to keep working together; learning together and supporting each other in these odd and difficult moments.’