

Inland Agency

private/non-profit

Serving the counties of
Riverside, San Bernardino,
Inyo and Mono



COMMUNITY
TOOL BOX



6235 River Crest Drive, Suite P
Riverside, CA 92507
(909) 697-6565 • Fax: (909) 697-6564

June 2001

Dear Prospective Neighborhood Academy Participant,

My name is Claudia Rojas and I am the Program Director of the Community Tool Box, a community-strengthening program that is based on the belief that when a community pools its resources (tools), it can better meet its needs. I had the privilege of participating in the Spring 2001 Adelanto Neighborhood Academy, along with 18 other Adelanto residents, 10 of which were youth between the ages of 14-19.

It is still difficult to describe the impact that the Neighborhood Academy had on the participants and on the city of Adelanto as a whole. For the first time ever in Adelanto, a group of concerned residents received training in what can be considered the most vital elements of community strengthening: community development, economic development, social development, cultural development and political development. Participants were taught how to incorporate their every day experiences into effective methods of discussion, workshops and action planning.

The greatest impact of the Neighborhood Academy was the sense of unity and pride it created among participants. Most came to the first session feeling nervous because they did not know what to expect, but by the second session it was evident that friendships were already beginning to foster. What was most impressive was the relationship that adults and youth were able to establish through the Neighborhood Academy. It was wonderful seeing everyone work together towards a common goal.

Before the Neighborhood Academy, my staff and I struggled with ways to effectively involve community members, as is often the case in community work, people came and went. I am happy to say that since the Neighborhood Academy all 19 graduates have remained actively involved with Community Tool Box activities. I thank the facilitators of the Neighborhood Academy for helping us inspire Adelanto residents to utilize their resources to create positive change.

Sincerely,

Claudia Rojas
Program Director
Community Tool Box

The *Inland Agency* family of health promotion and violence prevention programs:

- ◆ HICAP ◆ Desert Sierra Breast Cancer Partnership ◆ Caregivers ◆ Community Building Initiative
- ◆ People Reaching Out (PRO) ◆ Project YES ◆ A Better Community (ABC) Peace Program





InitiativesOnline



ICA staff member Anne Wilshin describes the positive impact of grassroots leadership development on several hispanic communities around the USA.

To learn more, click Neighborhood Academy or call:

Raúl Jorquera,
1-800-742-4032
or
Anne Wilshin,
773-769-6363, Ext. 296.

[Back to Resources Page](#)

Building Latino Leaders

The impact of the ICA's Neighborhood Academy program
Anne Wilshin

Adelanto, an upbeat small rural city in Southern California known today for poultry and new industry, literally means "I advance" or "I improve." Adelanto knows how to build grassroots leaders.

Adelanto has not always been so upbeat. After George Air Force Base was closed in 1992, the community not only lacked a high school and supermarket, but also a major employer. To make matters worse, residents had difficulty getting to available jobs elsewhere in the San Bernardino Valley. It was very hard for residents to believe that they could live up to their community's name.

After the based closed, the very time when volunteer involvement was most needed, few people had the time or energy for community work. The challenge of mobilizing residents was made more complex because of the make up of the community. Nearly 50% of Adelanto residents are Latino and national surveys have shown that Latinos are less likely to volunteer than their neighbors. Only 46% of Latinos volunteer each year, compared to a national average of 56%.

In early 2001, the Community Toolbox, a community strengthening program working in Adelanto, was wrestling with the challenge of volunteerism. The Toolbox had a rapidly growing youth leadership group but staff members found it difficult to recruit adults to work on their projects. With the nearest supermarket over 30 minutes away, they wanted to get more people involved in campaigning for a supermarket in Adelanto, as well as for creating employment opportunities and improving transportation links in the San Bernardino Valley. They wanted youth and adults to work together on these projects, and knew that with limited staff resources, volunteers would need excellent leadership skills and improved knowledge of the resources available in the community. Claudia Rojas, Program Director of a local capacity-building organization called the Community Toolbox, asked the ICA to help.

Practical Training, Significant Engagement



Eleven youth and eight adults ventured into a snowstorm to participate in Adelanto's first Neighborhood Academy, an ICA program designed to help community

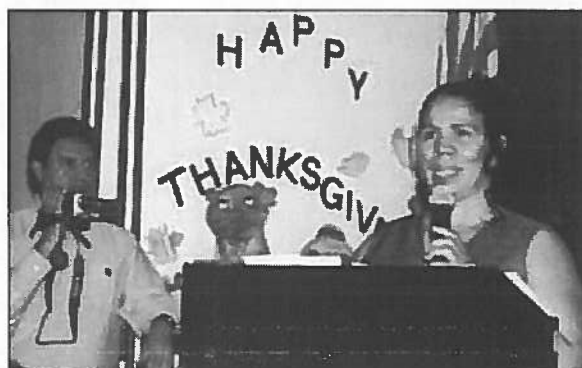
members cross the cultural bridges that lead to community involvement. Sessions were held during February, March and April, 2001, in an empty video store. Participants learned how to lead group discussions, e.g., about their personal contribution to the community;

how to facilitate a workshop, e.g., on what the group wanted to see happen in their city; and planned a community event celebrating Adelanto. The result was a festival attended by over five hundred people.

Intensive training and community engagement create remarkable friendships across the lines of gender, age, race and class. At the graduation ceremony, two rival gang members shook hands after working together during the Neighborhood Academy. At the ICA's request, these two young men joined eight other Neighborhood Academy youth graduates from Phoenix and Adelanto, to facilitate ten simultaneous workshops at the annual conference of the California Workforce Association, a 500-person conference for adults who serve youth.

After the Neighborhood Academy, Claudia Rojas wrote: "I am happy to say that since the Neighborhood Academy all 19 graduates have remained actively involved with Community Toolbox activities. I thank the facilitators of the Neighborhood Academy for helping us inspire Adelanto residents to utilize their resources [for] positive change."

The Confidence to Participate



The first Neighborhood Academy was held in February 1997 in the Sherman Heights neighborhood of San Diego in partnership with the Jacobs Center for Nonprofit Innovation. The eighteen people who graduated from that

program were all Spanish speakers. Now, five years and twelve Neighborhood Academies later, 200 people have graduated from the program in Arizona and California. 80% of the graduates speak Spanish as their first language and every Neighborhood Academy has been facilitated in both English and Spanish or totally in Spanish.

The Neighborhood Academy helps people develop the skills and confidence to participate in meaningful decision-making about the future of their local schools and community—no matter what their first language. Through participation in the program, youth and adults learn how to use the resources available in their community, how to work effectively with people of different ages and cultures, how to get more of their neighbors involved, how to hold productive neighborhood meetings and how to implement strategic community projects.

The experience of confidence can be transformative. Manuela Vital, a busy housewife and mother of three children living in the Heard neighborhood in Phoenix, Arizona is typical. She was initially a shy and quiet participant, eager to watch and learn but reluctant to speak. During the Neighborhood Academy her confidence increased by leaps and bounds as she came to the front of the room to facilitate discussions and workshops. After taking a leadership role in organizing

a cultural festival attended by over 500 people, Manuela reflected, "I never thought that participating in the Neighborhood Academy would turn into something so special for me... I gained self-confidence about speaking in public ... and I feel so proud, I never dreamed that I would be able to do that."

Now very little intimidates Manuela. After speaking before two hundred people at the Neighborhood Academy graduation ceremony, the principal at Heard Elementary School asked her to attend a school board meeting as an advocate for a new training and meeting center for parents. The principal had repeatedly asked the school board to approve funds for a center, but had had little success. Impressed with such rapidly emerging new leadership, he asked Manuela to explain to the board, from her perspective as a parent, why the center was urgently needed. In their remarks to the board, Manuela and other Neighborhood Academy graduates spoke so effectively that the board approved the \$70,000 dollars needed to build a new center.

Manuela's story is typical. Through the Neighborhood Academy, ICA staff help new leaders develop their potential and help community organizations to reap the benefits of their community's emerging talent. Manuela says things have changed at the school. "Staff at Heard Elementary School now see us as a resource and ask for our input on issues ... We finally feel that we are important to the school where our children go." Manuela has completed the first Neighborhood Academy Training of Trainers program and is poised to support more leadership training in the Heard neighborhood.

Trainees become trainers



The City of Adelanto is also busy transforming itself into a place where people can live up to the promise of their city's name—"to advance and improve." Twenty people graduated from Adelanto's

second Neighborhood Academy, held during April and May, 2002 and facilitated by graduates of the 2001 Neighborhood Academy alongside ICA staff. This year's participants organized a campaign to bring a supermarket to Adelanto. On May 8, 175 men, women and children marched behind a huge "Help Bring a Market" banner to bring a petition with 1,859 signatures to a receptive mayor and city council members. Neighborhood Academy grads gave passionate speeches about the importance of a local supermarket to the community. Writing in the High Desert section of the San Bernardino County Sun on May 13th, staff writer Vince Lovato quoted Mayor Tristan Pelayes, who addressed the marchers in both English and Spanish: "I'm glad all you people showed up. This is what it takes. Let's get the ball rolling."

Notwithstanding the barriers blocking Latino participation in communities, strong support from local community organizations such as Adelanto's Community Toolbox, combined with technical assistance and leadership training from the ICA can unlock an important talent pool



present in nearly every American community. Claudia Rojas writes: "The residents of Adelanto are poised and ready! Their dream of having such a basic need as a supermarket in their city will be realized; they have proven that positive change can happen."

A third Neighborhood Academy, with major leadership from local is planned for Adelanto in 2003.



The Neighborhood Academy can help transform your community—and you can help extend its impact. For more information about the Neighborhood Academy, contact the Neighborhood Academy team: Anne Wilshin (awilshin@ica-

usa.org or 773-769-6363, Ext. 296.), Raúl Jorquera (rjorquera@ica-usa.org; 1-800-742-4032) and Maria Muñoz (mmunoz@ica-usa.org; 1-800-742-4032).

Donations to the Neighborhood Academy

Your tax-deductible contribution to the Neighborhood Academy is important. \$35 provides an emerging leader with a bilingual course manual; \$100 provides a Trainer's Manual to a Neighborhood Academy graduate; \$500 makes it possible for an ICA Trainer to spend a week working with residents and community-based partner organizations, leading the Neighborhood Academy with community leaders and providing technical assistance to local residents.

[Top](#)

[Home](#) | [Programs](#) | [Resources](#) | [Organization](#) | [Site Map](#) | [Contact Us](#)

© 2001 The Institute of Cultural Affairs, USA
Site Designed by: Camba Design