

News Release
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**EI BARRIO RECEIVES \$76,000 NCLR GRANT
TO PREPARE LATINO WORKERS FOR CUSTOMER SERVICE CAREERS**

CLEVELAND (May 24, 2010) — West Side Ecumenical Ministry’s El Barrio Workforce Development Center is one of 10 National Council of La Raza (NCLR) U.S. affiliates and the only one in Ohio to receive a \$76,000 grant to prepare Latino workers for quality, upwardly mobile careers in the customer service and retail industry. National Council of La Raza is the largest national Latino civil rights and advocacy organization in the United States.

The grant was made possible by a \$1.2 million grant to NCLR from the Walmart Foundation to fund the work of NCLR’s Careers in Customer Service and Construction. The program provides industry-specific training and career readiness that is responsive to the needs of Latinos and other underserved communities.

The \$76,000 El Barrio grant to be paid in installments over two years will help support El Barrio’s Customer Service program, a NCLR designated national Best Practice Model. The four-week pre-vocational program is designed to prepare minority individuals for the increasing local demand as qualified customer service associates. Full-time training includes a mix of classroom instruction, role play, field trips to industry sites and high-tech, self-guided learning.

“One of the keys to our program’s success is that in addition to our internal instructors, we have external experts from over 30 El Barrio corporate partners who teach classes to our students,” says Ingrid Angel, El Barrio director. “The partners share real-life perspectives from the industry where our students hope to obtain employment.”

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Having that kind of direct exposure to hiring companies is invaluable, especially as rising unemployment continues to disproportionately affect Latinos. According to March 2010 unemployment figures released by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 12.6 percent of Hispanics were unemployed, compared to 9.7 percent of the overall labor force.

“High unemployment rates among Latinos has made it crucial for NCLR and its partners to create sustainable programs and models that enable Latino workers to gain a stronger foothold in the workforce and the economy,” said Janet Murguía, NCLR President and CEO. “This grant will enable NCLR to engage its community-based Affiliates in putting Latino families back to work.”

“This support of NCLR will address unemployment in the Latino community while teaching cutting-edge skills to those who need them most,” said Margaret McKenna, president of the Walmart Foundation. “As a long-time partner, we are committed to helping NCLR prepare workers for the jobs of today and tomorrow.”

About WSEM

Founded in 1966, West Side Ecumenical Ministry (WSEM) is a nonprofit social service organization working to help individuals and families become more self-sustaining through programs that provide emergency food and outreach services, employment training and placement, early childhood education and counseling solutions. For more information, visit www.wsem.org.

About El Barrio/WSEM Workforce Development Center

El Barrio/WSEM Workforce Development Center of Excellence assists more than 1,300 adults and youth each year achieve self-sustaining jobs by providing job preparation, case management, retention and pre-vocational training. Third-party certifications are offered in programs, such as customer service and pre-construction. El Barrio offers Job Readiness training and English as a Second Language (ESL) courses. All programs are free and open to the public.

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