



La Cocina VA
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December 28, 2020

Ashley Klick
Holy Trinity Catholic Church
3513 N. Street N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20007

Dear Ashley,

The staff at La Cocina VA and I would like to thank you for your grant to Support the Zero Barriers Training and Entrepreneurship Center (TEC). I would like to update you on our progress since the grant was award in June 2020.

Our Achievements

Our Move to the Zero Barriers Training and Entrepreneurship Center - Despite the pandemic, construction was completed, and we received Arlington County permits in June. We moved from Mt. Olivet Church and set up operations at the new facility including the kitchens with new equipment.

Opening of Community Cafe: We officially opened the Community Café on September 2, 2020. This provides employment opportunities for low-income individuals and generates revenue for the organization. We currently serving fresh, healthy breakfast and lunches, Here is a link to a story written in our local magazine “Arlington Magazine” which provides more details. <https://www.arlingtonmagazine.com/la-cocina-va-opens-cafe-on-columbia-pike/> We hired an operations manager who runs the Café and have since hired 8 low-income individuals as chefs and baristas.

Launch of Culinary Small Business Incubator: In November 2020 we launched our new Culinary Small Business Incubator to help low-income entrepreneurs start or expand food business. Our SBI Signature Program is a 9-week course, taught in both English and Spanish. We will also offer an SBI Express Program for low-income entrepreneurs who already have a business to formalize their business and access our services.

We have hired a part-time Small Business Coordinator to assist clients with kitchen rental and other services. Through a partnership, Northern Virginia Family Services has hired a full-time

Small Business Counselor that will work in our offices to train our clients. We have 8 low-income entrepreneurs in our first training cohort. This includes 7 women and 1 man, African-American and immigrants from Guatemala, Bolivia, Peru. Business range from South American/Afro-African cuisine, Bolivian healthy pastries to fresh, healthy beverages.

Implementing our Monitoring and Evaluation Software – We have successfully trained our staff and started using the Salesforce platform to provide a more robust monitoring and evaluation system across all programs. This will make us more efficient as an organization especially as our programs expand.

Food Assistance Program – We prepared 100 Thanksgiving family meals for distribution to families in low-income housing facilities and the homeless in conjunctions with a group called Latinas4Lations. We will be preparing 200 family meals over the holidays through the Islamic Relief USA. We are in discussions with a local church to provide meals which they would distribute on a regular basis.

Our Challenges

Due to COVID-19 restrictions and lack of employment opportunities we have not re-started our Culinary Training Program at TEC. The timing will be contingent on health and safety guidelines from the State of Virginia. We will also continue discussions with our partner employers to see the best time for expanding this program.

Although we have opened the Community Café we are not realizing the expected revenue we would like, due to less customers during the pandemic. We are hopeful that this situation will improve as the pandemic eases.

We had envisioned groups of volunteers helping out with our food assistance programs. Since large groups are not feasible at this time we have not been able to expand our Corporate Volunteers Program. We do have some individual mentors for the Small Business Program.

Given the pandemic, funding has shifted to emergency funding making funding for longer term projects more uncertain. We must still rely on our wide range of supporters from foundations, corporations, local and federal governments, community partners, international organizations and individual donors.

Thank you again. The support you have offered has been so important during this challenging year. We are hopeful for what the next year will bring.



Patricia Funegra
Founder and CEO