

El Futuro prepares for benefit luncheon and move to Lakewood Shopping Center



Photos and written reflections from the Hands Project line the walls of the waiting area at the El Futuro nonprofit clinic in Durham. The Hands Project documents and shares the progress of clients. (Photo by Marissa O'Neill)

By Marissa O'Neill

El Futuro will hold its annual benefit luncheon on March 9 from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. Two months later, the nonprofit clinic will relocate from its downtown Durham location to Lakewood Shopping Center.

El Futuro aims to nurture Latinx families and build stronger communities through bilingual and bicultural, evidence-based mental health and substance abuse services. The nonprofit has come a long way from its humble beginnings as a grassroots pilot program led by volunteer psychiatrists, doctors, social workers and community leaders in the early 2000s. Now, El Futuro strives to reach its goals in two main ways, according to Christopher May, the manager for development at El Futuro. First, through its two clinics—located in Siler City (opened in 2006) and in Durham (opened in 2009)—and second, through its educational programs and collaborative networks.

El Futuro serves clients across 20 counties in North Carolina; some clients travel to the brick-and-mortar clinics, while others receive therapy over the phone or webcam, May said. The clinics, which accept clients regardless of immigration status and ability to pay, now serve between 1,500 and 1,800 individuals each year.

“About 99 percent of the population we serve is at 200 percent or below the federal poverty level,” said May.

North Carolina is home to nearly one million Latinos, and as this number continues to grow, more Latinx families face barriers that hinder their ability to live out their dreams, said Kerry Brock, the director of advancement and strategy at El Futuro.

“From a lack of bilingual providers to not understanding where to turn for help, too many families that have faced extraordinary hardships due to poverty and migration have trouble accessing helpful care,” Brock said.

In May, El Futuro’s downtown Durham clinic will relocate to Lakewood Shopping Center. In 2016, the Scrap Exchange bought vacant spaces in the shopping plaza with plans to transform it into a community-based center called the Reuse Arts District (RAD), according to the organization’s website.

“We’re excited about the opportunity that this brings for synergy with other organizations that serve Latinos in the area,” May said. “We’ll be able to work more closely and hopefully reduce the amount of travel or coordination needed among these families that acquire services from these organizations.”

The new spot is also closer to the core of Durham’s Latinx community and includes other benefits like free parking and better accessibility, May said. The new location will have nearly 50 percent more clinic space and will better suit the nonprofit’s new educational and networking programs, according to May and Brock. The move is part of El Futuro’s larger 10-year vision to expand treatment services in North Carolina and develop a national model and resource center for Latinx mental health services.

“El Futuro wants to be able to educate others doing this work and to essentially establish a standard of practice, so our longer-term goal is actually to become a national model for mental health and substance abuse service provision to the Latinx community,” May said.

La Mesita, which means “the little table” in Spanish, is a network created by El Futuro that connects mental health providers working with Latinx populations, fostering a community to talk, share and learn.

“This is hard work, and too many providers face isolation and burnout as a result,” said Brock. “Through La Mesita, providers across the state will be strengthened in their services, and more Latino families will gain access to the quality, culturally sensitive care they need to get back to their dreams for the future.”

The program includes over 200 individual members across the state. Through La Mesita, El Futuro hosts a monthly webinar, an ongoing online forum and a learning cohort.

“The folks that we serve are very resilient individuals,” said May. “They’ve, a lot of times, gone through a lot—whether

it’s in their home country, or during migration, or even just here as they’re adapting to a new culture here. A lot of the stress and anxiety that we see is related to what we call acculturation stress.”

Christopher May

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The El Futuro team recognizes the importance of sharing the stories of its clients to a greater audience. The Hands Project is an ongoing effort at El Futuro to document and share progress of clients throughout their journey at the clinic. Photographs of clients’ hands and written reflections line the walls of El Futuro, creating a sense of hope and inspiration for current clients, while also respecting the privacy of those pictured.

“El Futuro is a place of refuge and healing for so many people, said Luke Smith, El Futuro’s executive director and one of two psychiatrists on staff. “Each person is special, and with each person, we celebrate as they make progress and get back on track with their dreams for a brighter future!”