

Reaching Out To Lend a Hand
Groups discuss services for, needs of local immigrants.

[By Bonnie Hobbs, Centre View](#)
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In a continuing effort to help immigrants in the local community, several groups offering services and programs for them gathered recently to exchange information.

"This meeting will be about sharing what our groups are doing, what are the needs we see and are these needs being met?" said Alice Foltz of Wellspring United Church of Christ in Centreville. "Then we'll discuss how we can help each other and where we go from here."

Her church's Outreach Committee sponsored the meeting, held Oct. 14 at Centreville Regional Library. And although services for other ethnic groups were mentioned, the focus was mainly on Centreville's growing Hispanic community.

Cheryl Repetti of the Centreville Community Foundation showed the Web site she's created so immigrants may find information on, for example, ESL courses, construction-industry vocabulary and foreign-language class sites.

"We have an ESL program with open enrollment throughout the year," said John Markham of Centreville Baptist Church. Beginning and intermediate classes are offered Wednesdays, from 6:30-8:30 p.m., and beginning classes, Thursdays, from 10-11:45 a.m., with child care available. The classes are for adults and cost \$25 each but, said Markham, "We allow people to join, even if they can't pay."

"We've done it for five years now, and we have students representing nearly every country on the planet," he said. "It gives people an outlet to practice the English language. People come in groups and learn together, and it's been very successful."

Centreville Baptist also hosts ethnic-language churches on Sundays. Spanish is at 11:15 a.m.; Korean, 2 p.m. and Vietnamese, 3:15 p.m.



Photo by Bonnie Hobbs/Centre View
John Markham, explaining Centreville Baptist Church's ESL program.



Photo by Bonnie Hobbs/Centre View
German Andino and Hilda Rexach



Photo by Bonnie Hobbs/Centre View
ESL teacher Paul White.



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REPRESENTING Western Fairfax Christian Ministries (WFCM) was Hilda Rexach. "We help people with food, finances, furniture and clothing," she said. "We have people of all faiths and countries, but the number of Spanish people we help has doubled from last year. They used to be the third-largest group we served — now they're first; it's Latinos, whites and African-Americans."

Rexach said the main reason they need assistance is because of the lack of jobs. "Before they ask for food, they ask, 'Do you know where I can find work?'" she said. "I do a lot of referrals to the Lincoln Lewis Multicultural Center for job counseling. If they're legal, it's OK. But if not, there's no way they can find a job. Most of the time, they come back discouraged because of this."

She said about 30 percent of the Hispanics WFCM is helping fled here from Prince William County. "The rest come because they lost their income," said Rexach. "In about 5 percent of the cases, the husbands were taken away and are no longer in the country."

Her husband, German Andino, works at Lincoln Lewis. "We help people find jobs," he said. "But it helps if they have green cards."

Paul White, who teaches ESL at the Centreville library, said most of his students speak some English, but don't have a means to practice. So, he said, "This 45 minutes to an hour at the library gives them the chance." Added Foltz: "I do tutoring at the library and have been amazed that they come from all around the world."

Next to speak was Esteban Garces of Tenants and Workers United. "I'm part of a team that responds to ICE [Immigration and Customs Enforcement] raids, making sure the arrestees have pro-bono, legal representation," he said. "I'm also trying to [improve our] Social Services response and I'm doing jail visits."

Regarding the 42 people arrested recently in an ICE raid at Dulles International Airport, Garces said all of them were men. "In many cases, their wives and children relied on them as their main sources of income," he said. "And we find that they don't trust any government entity — even if that entity is trying to help them."

But, he stressed, "Families need help [paying] their rent and utilities while, at the same time, they're trying to raise money for [the arrested father's] \$5,000 or \$10,000 bond. And this situation didn't happen to them gradually — it happened overnight. So it's a really sticky situation that we're trying to address."

Edgar Aranda, with the Legal Aid Justice Center in Falls Church, said his group is headquartered in Charlottesville and has 40 lawyers working in Virginia. He works in the immigration-advocacy program and says day laborers are its main focus.

"We have two lawyers who take employers to court if [day laborers] don't get paid," he said. "I conduct training and education about workers' rights — and knowing their rights in case of raids. We respond to raids with Esteban, and the need [for advocacy on behalf of immigrants] is huge."

Aranda said his organization is also targeting immigration reform. "I believe this is a good chance for everybody to get papers, get training and find a job," he said. "And the best way to empower [immigrants] is to teach them about their rights."

CONCERNED ABOUT the day laborers who gather outside the Centreville library in search of jobs, Foltz said, "We've finally found an ESL teacher who's volunteered to talk to these guys who stand on the corner and give them information about services available to them. We need to find out who these guys are, what they need and how many there are."

"Counting the families we help, I think we have 600," said Rexach. "We'd like to tell them about WFCM, Edgar and Esteban's programs and the ESL classes."

Barb Shaiko, director of missions for Centreville United Methodist Church, said the church offers ESL classes, Tuesday and Thursday mornings and evenings. Classes are two hours each and child care is available in the evenings. They run for three months in fall and winter/spring.

"Wednesday mornings, we have ESL Bible Study," she said. "It's currently all women and I teach it." Shaiko also told the others that CUMC now offers a Grace Ministries program, on particular Saturdays, for immigrants in need. The next one is Nov. 1. Doors open at 7 a.m., with registration and distribution of food, clothing, diapers and toys, from 8-10:30 a.m.

Refreshments are available, and the program also includes a short worship service in Spanish and English and often, information about immigration issues relevant to those attending. Volunteers — especially Spanish-speaking ones — are needed, as well as donations of clothes and diapers; call 703-830-2684.

At the meeting's end, Foltz listed the needs still existing: Help families left behind after ICE raids or eviction, find a central place to disseminate information, establish a job bank, obtain volunteers and donations for WFCM, continue contacts with day laborers and work on immigration reform.

"We had a regular set of families that donated to us each month," said Rexach. "With the economy now, many of them aren't [donating anymore]. Even our volunteers have been looking for jobs."

On Foltz's list of "Where do we go from here?" she and the others included the following: Share what each other's groups are doing, pass on information about other programs and resources; find more resources to help families at risk; deal with mental-health issues for these families; hold workshops for day laborers to apprise them of their rights if they're caught in a raid; and reach out to the business community for jobs.

"The big issue right now is families at risk because of the economy," said Foltz. "And it impacts what all of us are doing."



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