

LISTOS: Changing Migrants' Lives via Disaster Preparedness Education



Charlie receiving a gold foil badge sticker from Chief Orr as a testament to his engagement in class.

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Ten-year-old Charlie sat in the front row and refused all invitations to join the kids' corner. A son of a migrant agricultural worker from southern Mexico, Charlie began attending LISTOS' class with his mother. He was engaged, interested and eagerly participated in class activities. While Charlie was too young to be considered an "official student" of the LISTOS training, that did not discourage him from being present each session. At the end of the four weeks of LISTOS training, Charlie had

proven himself as one of the most enduring LISTOS class participants. He had successfully earned a place in the class and our hearts, including that of Santa Maria Fire Chief Dan Orr. Chief Orr was touched most by Charlie's commitment, something he looks for in all his firefighters. On the last night of class, as we were preparing to hand out certificates to graduating participants, we realized we needed to do something special for Charlie. Chief Orr asked Charlie to stand on a chair, and explained to the class via a translator that when firefighters graduate from the fire academy they participate in a pinning ceremony. He then proceeded to take out a gold foil badge sticker from his pocket and said, "Charlie, I give you this badge today with the promise that in 10 years, I will replace it with real a badge if you ever decide to become a firefighter. The City of Santa Maria would be honored to have you in our ranks."

That night changed the trajectory of Charlie's life, as well as that of everyone else in the room. Chief Orr had done something that we know can change children's lives. He believed in Charlie and told him so out loud in front of a room filled with family, friends and media. People, who may in the past have been afraid of first responders, saw a man encouraging a child of theirs to dream. On this evening, we realized that we were not only teaching disaster preparedness, but we were changing people's lives. We also knew that they told their friends and family because we went from 20 students in our first class, to 78 students in our second class.

LISTOS was piloted in 2010 in Santa Barbara County in California and has since been reproduced nationally. LISTOS is a Spanish language disaster preparedness program that was written with the target population in mind and not just translated from English to Spanish. It was created after an exhaustive search of Spanish language disaster preparedness curriculum. It was created in a style that reached the vulnerable Spanish-speaking populations in a culturally appropriate format.

LISTOS' goal is to create resilient communities via disaster preparedness training. It considers the participants' strengths, including but not limited to; formal and informal networks (churches, non-profits, neighborhoods, extended families) and proven resilience to remake their lives after migration to new and distant countries. The program is mobile and low tech, uses hands-on teaching methods and is provided at a very low cost. This follows goals that are in line with what is recommend by the MICIC Guideline 4, which stresses the importance of incorporating migrants in prevention, preparedness and emergency response systems, and emphasizes how taking into account the presence of migrants, their vulnerabilities, and their potential needs within the respective phases, including disaster risk reduction (DRR), can promote resilience in the event of a conflict or natural disaster

Gracie Huerta, LISTOS founder, establishes a unique connection with the LISTOS students by providing a safe environment for the participants and their families alike. The LISTOS training environment is welcoming and fun, and focused on families. This format allows participants to interact with community leaders, non-profit staff, and first responders in a non-emergency casual setting allowing all groups to learn about each other and establish relationships. Furthermore, it is an interesting and practical application of what is highlighted in the Guidelines to protect migrants in countries experiencing conflicts and natural disasters (MICIC Guidelines). In particular Guideline 6, on communicating effectively with migrants, emphasizes the importance of finding appropriate channels to communicate with migrants, identify their needs and capacities, and address language, cultural and other barriers.



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