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January - August 2013

# The Olathe Latino Coalition

## Condensed Report

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### ***Making Olathe a More Welcoming City for Latinos***

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#### **The Olathe Latino Coalition is a Sponsored Initiative of Significant Matters, Inc.**

Significant Matters is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that provides consulting and collaborative facilitation services for groups and organizations seeking to address complex societal issues in sustainable ways. We work with individuals, private business, city government, not-for-profits and especially the faith-based community both locally and internationally. To learn more about Significant Matters see [www.significantmatters.com](http://www.significantmatters.com) or contact us at 12480 S Black Bob Rd, Olathe, KS 66062 / 816-419-3291.



## 1. Overview and Mission of the Olathe Latino Coalition

The Olathe Latino Coalition (OLC) began meeting in the fall of 2011 in order to help shape a response to Olathe Mayor Michael Copeland's request for help in addressing the needs of the Latino community in Olathe. The OLC is comprised of diverse individuals and organizations residing in or working in Olathe with the Latino population.

The United States is a nation of immigrants and immigrants have helped drive economic growth. Likewise, Olathe has attracted immigrants since the city's founding. In 2008 Olathe was the 24<sup>th</sup> fastest growing city in the U.S. and CNN and Money magazine rated Olathe #11 on the 100 Best Cities to live in the U.S. Olathe offers affordable housing, an excellent school district and opportunities for business and economic development. This climate draws immigrants, who seek the same economic, educational, and quality-of-life opportunities as long-time U.S. residents.

Latinos represent 10.2% (12,794) of Olathe's population of 125,872 according to 2010 U.S. Census. Latinos represent 10.5% of the population of Kansas at 2,853,118. In the 2010-2011 school year, Latino students represent 12% of enrollment in Olathe School District. This Latino population is diverse and includes immigrants from many parts of Latin America as well as Latino families that have resided in Olathe for generations. This population plays a vital role in the Olathe community as workers, taxpayers, parishioners, neighbors, consumers, and entrepreneurs. If current growth trends over the past 10 years in Olathe remain the same by 2030 the Latino population of Olathe would be over 79,000 representing a 600% increase in numbers and 30% of the total population.

Our history and reputation around the nation and world for the deaf community has earned us the award as one of America's "Most Deaf Friendly Cities" by the organization Deaf 411, Inc. According to the report, "The rating acknowledges Olathe's culture that truly embraces the Deaf and Hard of Hearing and offers services and programs for the community. Olathe rates at the top of nearly every category measured, including culture, access to medical care and community programs." We have the steadfast hope that the same can be said of our city in its embrace of the Latino population and their unique challenges especially as related to the complex issue of immigration.

Historically Latinos have not been adequately engaged in civic life in Olathe and Latino undocumented immigrants even less so. Typically undocumented immigrants are left to fend for themselves trying to adapt to a new culture, new country, new human service systems, basically integrating into civic life in Olathe. Immigrants face barriers such as language, affordable housing, access health care, employment, and backlash due to anti-immigrant sentiments. This proposal and the work of the Olathe Latino Coalition has not been about immigration reform, that is conversation at the federal level. Instead we have focused our attentions on what a community can do at the local level to improve the quality of life for all regardless of their citizenship.

Olathe Latino pastors and human service organizations such as The Center of Grace, El Centro and Catholic Charities as well as the Olathe School District have encountered and assisted numerous individuals and families facing horrible and, at times, inhuman treatment in Olathe. Day laborers have been taken advantage of by unscrupulous contractors and not paid their wages for backbreaking,

economically-essential work that is often dangerous. Families complain about unfair rent practices, high deposits, and housing maintenance issues that create unhealthy living conditions. Undocumented immigrants are averse to filing complaints to authorities for fear of retribution and deportation.

OLC has outlined a Latino/Latino Immigrant Integration Framework. This Framework requires a mutual commitment between the City of Olathe government and Civic Organizations and the Latino/Latino immigrant communities. To be successful this integration framework must be embraced among mainstream institutions/businesses, Latino/Latino immigrant serving organizations and individual community members in Olathe. This framework must be intentional. Together with the established community Latino/Latino immigrants can contribute to community problem solving, bring innovation and creativity, enrich the cultural and social fabric and strengthen our community as a whole.

Immigration in Olathe is a result of the community's considerable successes. If Olathe is as strategic and earnest in its pursuit of integration approaches as it has been in facing other adaptive challenges throughout the community's history, Olathe can realize the potential advantages that immigration offers. All who call Olathe home—for business or residence—will reap the benefits.

We realize that the challenges we face together as a community in regards to our Latino neighbors are not solved easily or overnight. We appreciate the genuine interest being shown by our Mayor, City Manager and other city officials to invite us into a deeper conversation with the hope of making Olathe a model community for the Latino population. After extensive work with over 30 different Latino and Anglo leaders representing leading Latino organizations, churches, businesses, school district, social service agencies and city officials as well as hundreds of individual from within the Latino community we offer this proposal. It is our hope that it will serve as a foundational first step to a continued and steadfast partnership between the City of Olathe and the Olathe Latino Coalition as we work together to improve the quality of life for all Latinos regardless of their citizenship.

### ***The Mission of the Olathe Latino Coalition***

***To review and improve, where possible, various focus areas of life and business in the city in order to make Olathe a more welcoming city for all members of the Latino community regardless of citizenship.***

## **2. OLC Committees and Leadership**

The Coalition was set up with a lead team and six separate committees. The Lead Team was comprised of the committee team leads and a number of individuals from existing organizations who work with the Latino Community. Special attention was given to try and include Latino leadership in every way possible on all of the committee. The overall project was carried out through Significant Matters, Inc.; an Olathe based nonprofit organization that facilitates structured collaboration to solve more complex social issues at a community level.

## 2A. Special Thanks!

A project of this magnitude would not be possible without the sacrificial involvement of many capable people. The evidence of a willingness of so many people to work together to come up with this proposal speaks loudly of Olathe as a community. Special thanks go out to the leaders of the various committees listed below. It is their leadership and hard work that created this proposal and will, no doubt be a large part of the path forward to making Olathe a more welcoming city for all Latino's regardless of their citizenship.

## 2.B OLC Committees and Leadership

(A further description of the committees is included Additional Information and Supporting Materials)

### **City Government and Justice System**

- Laurie Anderson                      Immigrant Justice Advocacy Movement
- Pastor Daniel Bocanegra              Via de Esperanza

### **Education**

- Dr. Alison Banikowski                Olathe School District
- Jan Heinen                                Olathe School District
- Tabitha Davis                            MidAmerica Nazarene University

### **Business and Economic Development**

- Brad Cornell                              COO of Olathe Chamber of Commerce
- Raul Duran                                Arvest Bank

### **Community, Church and Culture**

- Pastor Brontis Varona                 Mosaikon Church
- Gary Kendall                              Indian Creek Community Church

### **Housing**

- Aude Negrete                              El Centro
- Karla Davis                                MidAmerica Nazarene University

### **Health and Social Services**

- Darren Odum                                Olathe Medical Center

### **Members-at-Large**

- Hector Silva                                OLC Managing Director
- Mary Lou Jaramillo                      El Centro
- Sylvia Romero                              Center of Grace
- Tom Bassford                               Significant Matters

### **Interns:**

- Karla Davis                                 MidAmerica Nazarene University, Junior
- Emerald Taylor                              MidAmerica Nazarene University, Senior

## **2C. Additional Thanks**

Thanks to area students and NW High School for their involvement. In order to make information about the Olathe Latino Coalition accessible to everyone a website was developed. The Website was designed and built by an e-communications student from Olathe NW High School. The student worked on the Website as a project for credit.

We presented the Olathe Latino Coalition to an established group of Latino students that is part of the Olathe School District. We asked the students to speak to their family and friends in the community about the coalition. We also asked some of the group to become representatives of the group and provide us with the youth point of view on the six areas of life and business.

## **3. Process**

### **3.A Stakeholder Involvement**

From the beginning the OLC sought to involve key stakeholders across the city from all the major sectors including private business, the Faith Community, City government and agencies, Healthcare, social services and education to name a few. The active involvement of organizations such as Olathe Medical Center, The Olathe School District, Center of Grace, El Centro, Immigrant Justice Advocacy Movement and the Chamber of Commerce gave us the capacity to address issues at a relatively high level. We visited many churches, groups and individuals to describe the purpose, the mission, the structure and the process to them. We asked them to spread the word within the community and gave them the opportunity to join the coalition.

### **3B. Committee Work**

Each committee had one or more leads and the committees met on a regular basis from January through July of 2013. They reached out to the Olathe Latino Community for input to the various areas of life and business. Based on input from the Latino community and also ideas from within each committee wrote a number of action plans that are included in this proposal.

### **3C. Latino Leadership Solidarity – A Chord of Three Strands**

One of the often misunderstood realities of the Latino population is that because they all speak a common language they all have the same background and outlook on things. The truth is that the Latino community is made up of individuals and groups from over 20 different countries each with their own heritage and cultural background. And although all Latinos face similar challenges they struggle like any other group to form their own bonds of solidarity in order to work together.

One of the goals of the OLC was to try and encourage a core group of Latino leaders to forge a partnership of trust that could bear the weight of true collaboration and begin to speak with one voice about some of the most pressing needs of the Latino community as a whole. Over time three Latino leaders within our community came together to form a “chord of three strands” reflecting the idea behind the words in Ecclesiastes, *“A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.”* We asked these three leaders to wrestle with the many different Action Plans included in this proposal and lift three of them as most pressing for the Latino Community. The intention is not to lessen any of the other Action Plans but rather to give the Latino leadership of our City the opportunity to make a statement about what

they feel are the most pressing issues facing the people they serve on a daily basis. Those three leaders are:

- Daniel Bocanegra – Pastor of Via DeEsperanza / Guatemala
- Sylvia Romero – Director of Center of Grace / Colombia
- Brontis Varona – Pastor of Mosaikon / Mexico

The Action Plans they identified as most pressing are listed on pages 32-33 of this proposal.

### **3D. Town Hall Meetings**

The Coalition also communicated their mission and purpose to the Latino Community through two Town Hall Meetings. The **first Town Hall meeting** was held in January at the beginning of the committee formation and initiation of committee work. This Town Hall meeting was attended by over 80 members of the Latino Community. In the meeting they were introduced to the purpose, goals and structure of the Olathe Latino Coalition

### **3E. Survey Overview**

Part of the work of the Olathe Latino Coalition was to conduct a community survey to help identify important issues as well as strengths and needs within the community. Our intention was to get data points to help direct our Action Plans and serve as bench marks for future work within the Latino Community. We partnered with El Centro to do the data analysis. The English version of the survey is included in the section entitled “Additional Information and Supporting Materials.” What follows is a sample summary of some of our findings.

- **Dealing constructively with the undocumented population.**  
Seventy-nine percent of the people we surveyed listed “lack of help for the undocumented” as a concern for them. That number reflected what we heard over and over again in the Town Hall meetings and conversations with the Latino community. Dealing with the complexities of the undocumented is a constant barrier to almost every Latino, even those who are documented. There are ways a local community can deal with the undocumented that help improve the quality of life for all citizens of the city and some of those ideas are reflected in the Action Plans.
- **Latinos are “settling” in Olathe.**  
The average age of the Latinos we surveyed was 41 and over 50% have lived here for over 10 years. Seventy-one percent are either satisfied or very satisfied with their life in Olathe and 79% have a strong and favorable opinion of the School System. All of this suggests that Olathe is not attracting a transient population but rather Latinos who have families and want to settle down and make Olathe their home.
- **Housing; a challenge and a goal.**  
When having a problem with a landlord 81% of those surveyed said they have no idea who to call or where to get help. Our Town Hall meetings suggested that language was an equally big

challenge when trying to find help over the phone. One in five surveyed said they already own their home and 84% said they would like to own.

- **Looking for better work**

Employment appears to be an ongoing challenge. Over 90% are working either full or part-time but over 52% say their family household earnings are less than \$20,000/year with less than 2% making over \$50,000/year. When it comes to accessing job training or placement services over 90% of those surveyed say they have never used employment training programs or services like the Kansas Work Force Partnership.

- **Who do you trust?**

The Olathe School District and churches rated highest as to organizations that are most trusted by the Latino population. Much of the qualitative data we got suggested that information flow to the population was critical and that churches and the school system are in a unique position to be able to get information to the population.

- **Healthcare**

Forty-four percent said they had not been to a doctor in the past year. Of those that did go 34% indicated they used the emergency room at Olathe Medical Center and 21% say they use the services of The Health Partnership Clinic of Johnson County. Additionally, 39% indicated they needed to see a doctor in the last 12 months but were unable.

- **Fear, Discrimination and Legal Assistance**

Approximately one in three people surveyed reported experiencing some form of discrimination in Olathe. Of those that answered yes the results were evenly distributed over police and criminal justice (16%), employment (16%), housing (13%), other (13%). Nearly one in four (23%) said they had worked and not been paid for that work in the past. When asked, “Do you feel safe to call the police when a need arises,” 45% answered “no.” Sixty-one percent indicated that either they or someone in their family has needed an attorney and over 90% of those who answered the question indicated it was either impossible or difficult to get this service.

## 4. Action Plans

The purpose of *The Olathe Latino Coalition Final Report and Recommendations* is to suggest a path forward for improving the quality of life for all Latino’s and strengthening our City. It is our hope that the City will continue in a dialogue with us on our findings, Action Plans and recommendations and ultimately support this proposal in the following ways:

- Officially adopt some form of this proposal
- Through appropriate agencies and departments of the City take on or participate in one or more of the Action Plans listed herein.
- Help establish the Olathe Latino Coalition as a Collective Impact Project for the next 3 years.