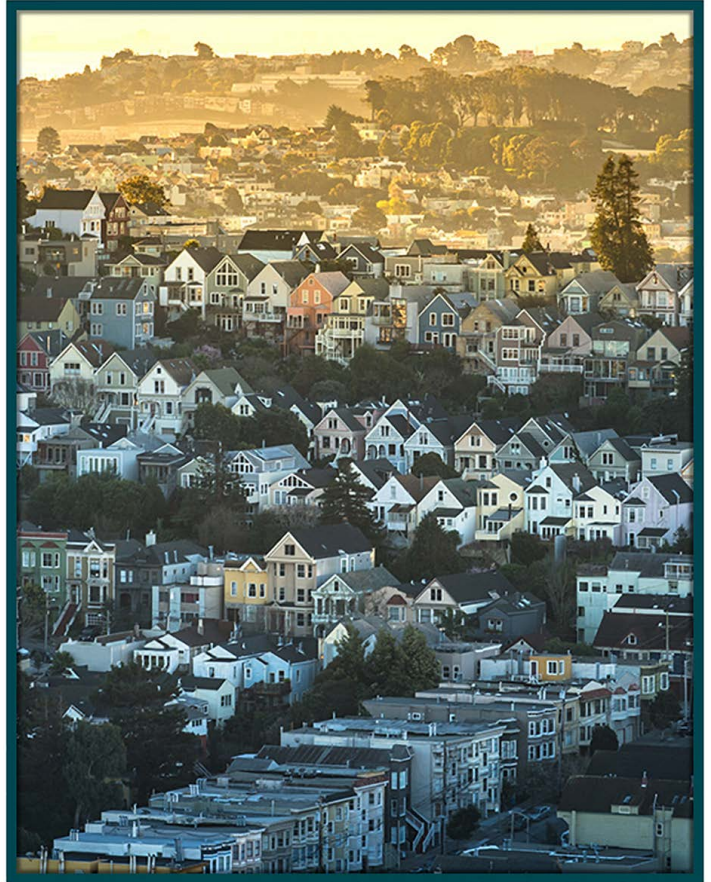


DE LA
COMUNIDAD,
PARA LA
COMUNIDAD



KEY ACHIEVEMENTS
OF THE *PROMOTORAS*
PROGRAM DURING
COVID-19

MISSION ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT AGENCY
DECEMBER 2020



"Promotoras, as community outreach workers, have quickly become integral to MEDA's service delivery model. Their understanding of and connection with the community members we serve has proved invaluable, especially during this crisis. We look to evolve this work to ensure its full integration into our approach to service delivery over the long term."

**LUIS
GRANADOS**
CHIEF EXECUTIVE
OFFICER, MEDA

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- 8 STRENGTHENING OUR ORGANIZATION
- 9 FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE *PROMOTORAS* PROGRAM

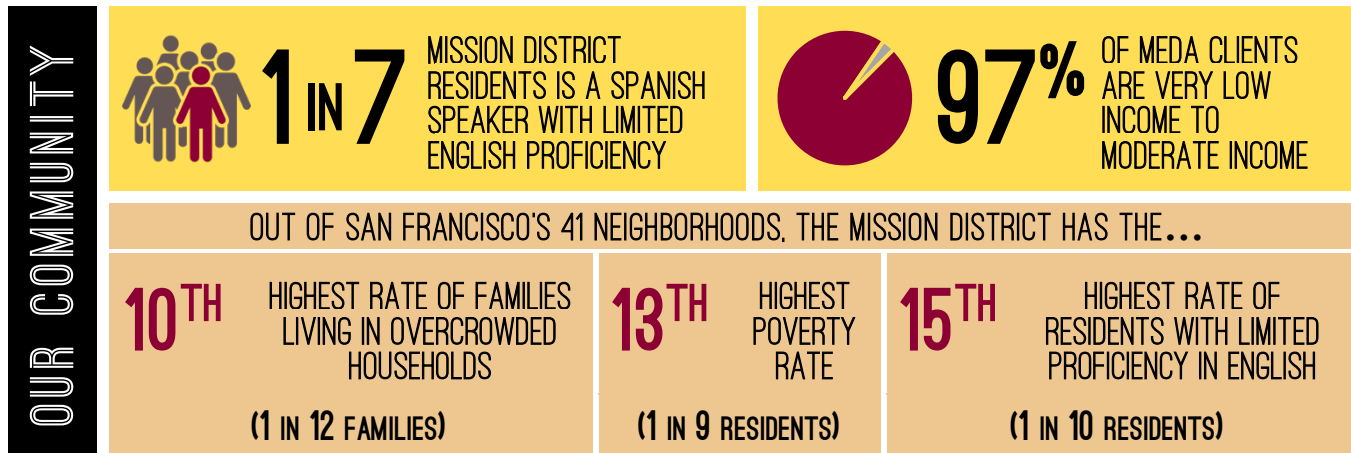
} KEY
FINDINGS

"My greatest achievement as a promotora and as a human being is to be able to provide my services in the best way, to create trust with clients, and help them feel comfortable. That fills me with satisfaction. I love my work, knowing that I can help others and share what I know."

PROMOTORAS
TEAM
MEMBER

INTRODUCTION TO MEDA AND THE *PROMOTORAS* PROGRAM

The Mission Economic Development Agency (MEDA) is a nonprofit organization based in San Francisco's Mission District that predominantly serves low-income Latino families, workers and small businesses. Founded in 1973, MEDA combines a suite of programs—direct asset-building services, school-based family supports, affordable housing development, loan disbursement, advocacy and technical assistance—to build Latino prosperity, community ownership and civic engagement.



In 2016, MEDA began to recruit community members as grassroots outreach workers, or *promotoras*, to serve as on-the-ground liaisons between local residents and MEDA programs. Latin American countries first adopted *promotoras* programs in the 1970s for public health purposes, to serve marginalized, harder-to-reach residents. This model has also been useful for engaging our clients over the past four years. MEDA serves many residents with limited English proficiency who face difficulties in navigating local service systems, and many undocumented residents who cannot access public benefits. Embedded in school- and community-based sites across the neighborhood, *promotoras* offer a first line of assistance to local residents. Our team members are able to provide information, offer supportive services and direct clients to more intensive services offered by MEDA's coaches and community partners. By offering an accessible point of connection, our 20 *promotoras* are a lifeline for our underserved neighbors, and complement the work of MEDA's and our partners' program staff.

The COVID-19 pandemic has made the work of the *promotoras* all the more crucial. COVID-19 exacerbated many of the structural disparities that low-income Latinos in San Francisco already faced, and many of our clients have deeply suffered the financial and health consequences of the pandemic. With coordination and support from MEDA's Community Initiatives Manager, the *promotoras* have embraced a range of new roles and responsibilities in order to serve the many residents facing urgent needs and difficult circumstances during the COVID-19 pandemic. In June 2020, JPMorgan Chase invested \$250,000 in MEDA to fund the expansion of the *promotoras* program and augment the invaluable work that *promotoras* have advanced during the pandemic.

Despite the steep challenges that COVID-19 has posed, the *promotoras* have thrived in their role as community leaders in 2020. This report explores the many contributions that the *promotoras* have made to the Latino community and to MEDA before, and during, COVID-19, and considers opportunities for the *promotoras* program in the years to come.

DATA METHODS

During the summer and fall of 2020, MEDA's Evaluation team gathered perspectives and insights on the *promotoras* program from a variety of stakeholders, including MEDA staff, MEDA clients and the *promotoras* themselves.

Our data collection activities and sources are listed below.

- Phone-based focus groups with:
 - 19 *promotoras*
 - 15 clients who have received MEDA services during the pandemic
- Online surveys of:
 - The *promotoras* team
 - MEDA service staff
- One-on-one interviews with:
 - One *promotora*
 - MEDA's Community Initiatives Manager
 - MEDA's Associate Director of Data and Learning
- Aggregated client service data from MEDA's Salesforce database

This report uses thematic analysis to connect perspectives, experiences and insights across these eight data sources into a distilled set of key findings. (See page 4.)

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, all data collection activities were remote. To protect people's privacy, we anonymously quote the *promotoras*, MEDA staff and clients who contributed their perspectives to this report. We have translated client and *promotora* remarks from Spanish.



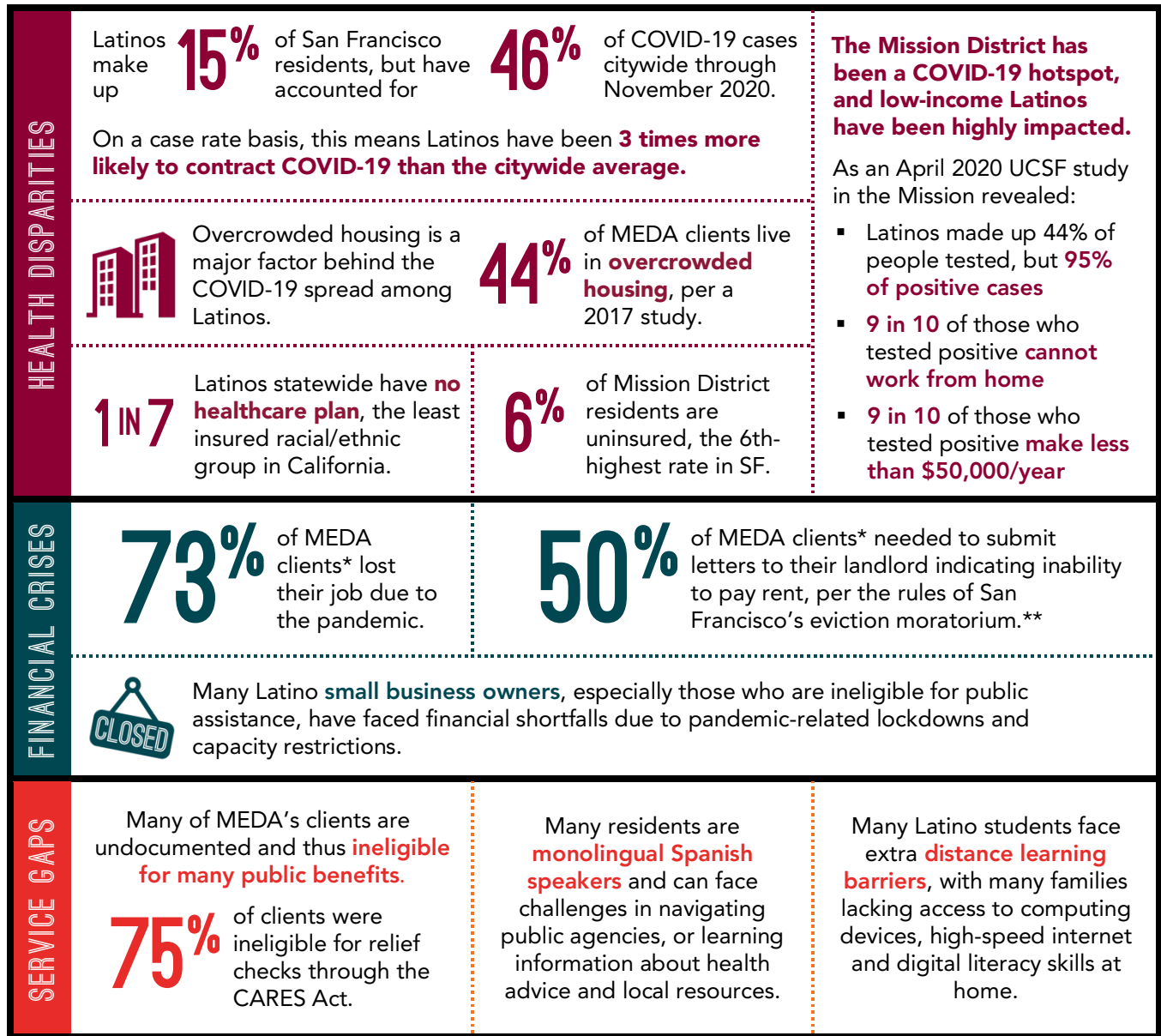
MEMBERS OF MEDA'S *PROMOTORAS* TEAM

MEDA STAFF MEMBER

"The promotoras represent the people we serve in our community. They are the mothers, the workers, the caregivers, the activists and changemakers."

CONTEXT: LATINOS AND COVID-19 IN SAN FRANCISCO

The onset of COVID-19 in March 2020 worsened the existing financial, social and health disparities that our low-income Latino community members have long faced. Combined with data gathered from our clients, the citywide statistics on our community’s health and social service needs are alarming.



In order to meet the enormity of these challenges, in March 2020 MEDA reorganized our programs to serve a high volume of clients remotely and address their income, housing and business-related needs. As the following pages explore, *promotoras* have been an integral part of our pandemic response efforts, and a critical lifeline for many community members in harrowing times. Despite these challenges, the *promotoras* have risen to the challenge and excelled in several capacities.

*Clients seeking services from MEDA between March and November 2020.

**This figure combines clients who wrote a letter to their landlord on their own, plus those requesting assistance from MEDA.

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS AND FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

This report explores the key contributions and achievements of the *promotoras* during the COVID-19 pandemic across three core domains:

SERVING FAMILIES IN NEED	<i>Promotoras</i> have assumed several essential roles within MEDA’s pandemic response programs, such as providing direct services to community members.
	As local residents and native Spanish speakers, <i>promotoras</i> engage their neighbors in culturally affirmative ways, building trust and inviting more clients to seek services.
	<i>Promotoras</i> have been essential in advancing MEDA’s service partnerships with other city and community agencies, enabling us to address more of our community members’ urgent needs.
DEVELOPING LEADERSHIP SKILLS	<i>Promotoras’</i> wide-ranging work during the pandemic has established and expanded their roles as trusted local leaders.
	<i>Promotoras</i> have become proficient in our service delivery and data systems, and have bolstered their own professional development as skilled service providers.
	The <i>promotoras</i> program is an enriching opportunity for local residents who are passionate about supporting their fellow community members.
STRENGTHENING OUR ORGANIZATION	As engaged members of the community, <i>promotoras</i> help MEDA develop a better understanding of the different needs and challenges of our service population.
	By taking on several roles during the pandemic, <i>promotoras</i> have been pivotal in supporting MEDA’s staff within a highly stressful work context.
	<i>Promotoras</i> are our frontline community liaisons, and uphold MEDA as an accessible, trustworthy resource for Latino families.

We look forward to leveraging the *promotoras* program in several key areas, including:

FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE <i>PROMOTORAS</i> PROGRAM	Developing the <i>promotoras</i> program into a workers’ cooperative for sustainability and stability	Incorporating <i>promotoras</i> across MEDA’s post-pandemic community recovery efforts
	Deepening integration between the work of the <i>promotoras</i> and that of MEDA’s staff	Sharing lessons learned with other nonprofits to start their own <i>promotoras</i> programs

SERVING FAMILIES IN NEED KEY FINDINGS - PART ONE

The promotoras team has been indispensable to MEDA’s pandemic response, personally engaging and supporting hundreds of community members with multiple urgent needs.

Offering an array of services and supports. The sheer number of clients seeking services and the severity of needs required the *promotoras* to take on many more services and responsibilities than before the pandemic. *Promotoras* became essential in providing short-term direct services to hundreds of local families across multiple programs, helping MEDA’s staff to focus on more specialized or intensive client supports. In addition, *promotoras* have referred clients to MEDA programs and community partners, answered questions about available community resources, and provided other *ad hoc* assistance as needed.

In working with community members, *promotoras* have:

- Conducted needs screenings with community members, and referred to appropriate MEDA staff for follow-up services
- Referred clients to partner agencies’ services
- Helped clients apply for affordable housing on San Francisco’s online portal, DAHLIA
- Supported clients in applying for relief through the GIVE2SF COVID-19 Response & Recovery Fund
- Assisted clients in writing letters to landlords to announce nonpayment of rent, per the city’s eviction moratorium
- Provided information about remote learning resources for students and families
- Promoted MEDA’s bilingual Facebook Live informational events through social media
- Updated client service records in MEDA’s Salesforce database

With all of these responsibilities, *promotoras* have occupied crucial roles across the entire spectrum of our crisis response activities.

MEDA CLIENT	<p><i>“A promotora sent me a link [to apply for a relief grant]...and helped me fill everything out. Thanks to [her], I was able to pay two months’ worth of rent and stay up on payments.”</i></p>
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<p>PROMOTORAS SERVICE HIGHLIGHTS BEFORE & DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC</p>	<p>1,522 COMMUNITY MEMBERS SCREENED FOR PANDEMIC-RELATED NEEDS</p>	<p>432 FAMILIES PROVIDED WITH PANDEMIC-RELATED SERVICES</p>	<p>1,653 AFFORDABLE HOUSING APPLICATIONS SUBMITTED WITH SUPPORT FROM <i>PROMOTORAS</i></p>
<p>THE <i>PROMOTORAS</i> TEAM HAS HELPED PROCESS 72% OF CLIENTS’ AFFORDABLE HOUSING APPLICATIONS SINCE 2016 - 18,000+ FORMS</p>	<p><i>PROMOTORAS</i> HAVE HELPED MEDA SUPPORT 40% MORE FAMILIES WITH HOUSING OPPORTUNITY SERVICES IN 2020, COMPARED TO 2019</p>		
<p>BEFORE THE ONSET OF COVID-19, <i>PROMOTORAS</i> CALLED 3,082 LATINO COMMUNITY MEMBERS TO ENCOURAGE PARTICIPATION IN THE 2020 U.S. CENSUS</p>			

“Sometimes, due to the language barrier, people in the community do not look for the kind of help [that MEDA provides...The promotoras are] really needed in the community, because many times, mostly because of fear, people don’t apply for services. The more we are informed...we will have better opportunities for our community.”

MEDA
CLIENT

Providing culturally affirmative services and engagement. As Latina and Latino community members, *promotoras* are able to outreach to local families by building connections through shared language, backgrounds and experiences. By supporting community members in native Spanish, *promotoras* help to address the language barriers that many residents with limited English proficiency face when seeking supportive services. As well, *promotoras* are local residents whose own families have struggled with the financial and health consequences of COVID-19, and can connect to our clients through enduring those common challenges. Building familiarity and trust is central to the work of the *promotoras*, who help our clients feel more understood, safe and empowered to advocate for themselves and their families.

MEDA
STAFF
MEMBER

“Promotoras...have stepped up to the challenge. Not only were they facing the [difficulties posed by the] pandemic, but they...use[d] what they knew, and learned to help other families who could be in the same situations.”

Expanding MEDA’s service partnerships. *Promotoras* have been at the forefront of MEDA’s new joint initiatives with both community-based organizations and citywide agencies, which has enabled us to connect our families to a wider network of necessary services during the pandemic. Without the work of the *promotoras*, these collaborations would not have been possible.

Some *promotoras* have provided in-person services and referrals at the Mission Hub, a food distribution center that has become a congregation point for residents to receive help from local organizations. Their presence at the Hub has helped refer MEDA families to organizations that provide additional services, and have brought additional community members to MEDA’s pandemic response services.

Furthermore, six *promotoras* have taken on key roles for MEDA’s new partnership with the San Francisco Department of Public Health and UCSF Contact Tracing program. These specially trained *promotoras* contact Spanish-speaking families exposed to COVID-19 in order to provide referrals to testing, treatment and support services as needed. With the deep spread of COVID-19 among Latino families, these new duties are crucial to mitigating the virus within local Spanish-speaking communities.

95%

OF *PROMOTORAS* FEEL COMFORTABLE WORKING WITH CLIENTS WHO ARE GOING THROUGH DIFFICULT SITUATIONS DURING COVID-19

95%

OF *PROMOTORAS* AGREE THAT THEY HAVE BEEN ABLE TO HELP MOST MEDA CLIENTS DURING THE PANDEMIC BY PROVIDING INFORMATION, SERVICES OR REFERRALS

DEVELOPING LEADERSHIP SKILLS

KEY FINDINGS - PART TWO

The promotoras have taken on new leadership roles during the pandemic, thriving as capable service providers and trusted sources of support for community members.

Fostering local leadership. Although *promotoras* are humble about the work they do, it is clear that they have cemented their role as community leaders through all of their roles and responsibilities during the pandemic. *Promotoras* must be effective communicators with many different people, help families facing a number of different circumstances and balance technical advice with emotional support. These are all undeniable leadership qualities, and some *promotoras* have noted how their participation in the program has helped them grow in self-confidence and flourish as community changemakers.

PROMOTORAS
TEAM MEMBER

"[Being a promotora] has helped me feel more secure when expressing myself—something that was a little hard for me."

Strengthening professional skills. Members of the *promotoras* team have adopted new technical and professional abilities through their new service provider roles. In addition to their ongoing talents as outreach workers, *promotoras* have learned how to navigate multiple social service systems; update client records in MEDA's Salesforce database; and help clients build their own digital literacy skills. As such, *promotoras* have built skill sets that would make them valuable additions to the staff of many different community organizations.

"It satisfies me that families receive help, receive a relief check, receive housing, because it's more than just a promise [we made to them]."

PROMOTORAS
TEAM MEMBER

Fueling passion for service. *Promotoras* are deeply committed to serving and improving the conditions of the families in their community. The *promotoras* program offers our participants the professional opportunity to pursue this personal passion as part of their day-to-day activities. While team members have faced their fair share of hurdles when helping community members in dire circumstances during the COVID-19 pandemic, they nevertheless speak with deep zeal for their work. *Promotoras* have rejoiced in seeing the families they serve receive the necessary support to stay in their homes, keep food on the table and ensure their children have a safe learning environment.

79%
OF PROMOTORAS
HAVE BEEN
WORKING WITH
MEDA FOR ONE
YEAR OR LONGER

100%
OF PROMOTORAS FEEL
COMFORTABLE WORKING
VIA PHONE OR COMPUTER
TO SUPPORT COMMUNITY
MEMBERS

95%
OF PROMOTORAS FEEL THAT
MEDA HAS PROVIDED AMPLE
SUPPORT TO LEARN NEW
RESPONSIBILITIES AND ROLES
DURING THE PANDEMIC

STRENGTHENING OUR ORGANIZATION

KEY FINDINGS - PART THREE

Promotoras ensure that MEDA is a trusted name among community members who would benefit from our services, and provide essential support for MEDA's service staff.

Deepening MEDA's community presence. *Promotoras* have been essential to ensuring that MEDA can maximize its outreach among the many underserved and marginalized families in need of pandemic-related supports. In addition to providing services to families actively seeking support from MEDA, the *promotoras* team has also conducted preemptive outreach to hundreds of community members, to make sure that families have not slipped through the cracks. As embedded community members, *promotoras* also bring back to MEDA their deep knowledge about our clients' priority needs and concerns, which helps us make our programs more effective and accessible.

MEDA
STAFF
MEMBER

"Promotoras have spoken on behalf of the organization, they have offered resources, they have called clients [with the] understanding that all of us are going through this situation...They have played a [very] important role because people call them directly [for help]."

Supporting service staff. The pandemic has been an especially taxing time for MEDA's program staff, who take great pride in their service to community members. With so many families seeking support, and going through such distressing circumstances, many staff have contended with exhaustion and vicarious trauma. By taking on some of the service roles historically reserved for staff, *promotoras* have played an inextricable role in helping our program teams address the volume of client needs, and focus on the specialized services that require extensive staff experience. *Promotoras* have thus provided essential capacity support during a highly stressful period for clients and staff members alike.

"We have to have empathy [with clients]. I'm really happy and thankful that the opportunity to help the community is in my hands. I'm here to serve them."

PROMOTORAS
TEAM MEMBER

Building trust between MEDA and community members. The sheer number of clients seeking help from MEDA during COVID-19 has limited an important element of our direct service model: our program staff's ability to build rapport and extended relationships with our clients. Sometimes, it takes prolonged engagement between our service staff and community members to create the baseline of confidence and trust for prospective clients to seek services. While *promotoras* have also faced challenges in meeting the needs of so many clients, they have been able to provide this key relational support. A *promotora's* ability to offer emotional comfort and answer a family's detailed questions can be the deciding factor in helping the family receive much-needed financial relief or health assistance.

100%

OF *PROMOTORAS* HAVE TAKEN ON
NEW ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES
DURING THE PANDEMIC

95%

OF MEDA'S DIRECT SERVICE STAFF FEEL THAT THE
PROMOTORAS HELPING TO PROVIDE SERVICES HAS
BEEN SUPPORTIVE TO STAFF MEMBERS

FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE *PROMOTORAS* PROGRAM

The *promotoras* have been an indispensable part of our response to the COVID-19 crisis. Despite the many challenges our community has faced, the *promotoras* program has been a major success for our community, MEDA and the *promotoras* themselves. The next stage in the evolution of MEDA's comprehensive service model will depend on the ongoing expansion of the *promotoras* program and its integration with our services. Looking ahead, we intend to build upon the *promotoras'* recent achievements to pursue these promising innovations and initiatives in the years to come:

Supporting the development of the *promotoras* team into a workers' cooperative. Starting in 2021, MEDA is excited to catalyze the growth of the *promotoras* program into an independent company under a collective worker-owner model. Under this configuration, the *promotoras* team will exist as its own business entity able to contract its services with MEDA and other agencies, manage its profits and provide benefits to its members. MEDA will initially help to manage this initiative, and then continue to provide technical assistance and training following the cooperative's incorporation as a business entity.

This strategy will benefit MEDA, community members and *promotoras* alike. Our ongoing partnership with the *promotoras* team will allow us to continue our deep, culturally affirmative engagement with local Latino families. Meanwhile, incubating the development of the *promotoras'* cooperative will provide a sustainable foundation for the team members' professional growth and financial stability, and enable them to apply their talents to new partnerships with fellow community service providers.

MEDA STAFF
MEMBER

"With MEDA, the promotoras empower themselves in order to empower others."

Expanding MEDA's pandemic response and recovery strategies. As of the time of writing in December 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic continues rising to unprecedented highs in the Bay Area, and Latino workers and families continue to suffer from the disease disproportionately. Furthermore, thousands of low-income families continue to face intense financial hardships, especially with San Francisco's eviction moratorium set to expire soon. In 2021, we face the challenge of helping clients keep their homes, recuperate from the virus, obtain basic necessities and/or find reliable sources of income. We anticipate that the *promotoras* will build upon their achievements as a critical part of MEDA's multidimensional service model through the remainder of the pandemic.

In addition, *promotoras* will be essential team members in helping our Latino community members navigate long-term economic recovery post-COVID. MEDA will pivot to meet this challenge, shifting our services and programs to help families, workers and small businesses rebuild. The *promotoras'* skills in grassroots outreach and community service will be invaluable to MEDA, helping us develop a deeper understanding of families' recovery needs and deepening our impact among the Mission's most underserved Latinos. By grounding our recovery programs in deep engagement with our clients, the *promotoras* team will help MEDA achieve one of our major goals: a post-pandemic Mission community that has advanced beyond the deep structural disparities hindering our families.

Strengthening client services through cross-teams collaboration. As *promotoras* and MEDA staff have had increasingly overlapping responsibilities during the pandemic, it is crucial that we bring these teams into closer partnership. Regularly convening *promotoras* and service staff to collaborate will further streamline client referrals, wraparound care and coordination of services across programs. *Promotoras* have experience providing client support across multiple service domains, and can thus offer valuable insight to MEDA about how to engage marginalized community members, enhance our program integration, and maximize our impact among our low-income Latino clients. Bringing the *promotoras* deeper into our service coordination will thus be a mutual learning opportunity with staff members, and help ensure that MEDA can provide the most comprehensive level of support for clients.

Sharing lessons learned and best practices about the *promotoras* model with community partners. Over the past four years, *promotoras* have been at the forefront of MEDA's community-based efforts, serving as representatives of our organization in their work as outreach workers. The COVID-19 pandemic further cemented the *promotoras*' importance to our organization, as team members assumed a wealth of new roles quickly and capably in order to assess community members' needs and connect families to valuable services and supports. In both the short term and long term, MEDA has identified several lessons learned in *promotoras* program development, including:

- Recruitment and cultivation of talented, passionate local residents to serve as community liaisons as part of an organization's broader community engagement strategy
- Engagement of community members in ongoing professional development through a group education model rooted in *promotoras*' interests
- Use of culturally affirmative communication to build rapport with community members, encourage families to participate in services and instill confidence in clients
- Innovative and flexible employment practices that provide financial sustainability and career growth trajectories, especially for undocumented residents
- Integration of *promotoras* into a multi-departmental service model, including delegation of service roles and referral pathways between *promotoras* and staff
- Engagement with like-minded community organizations to scale the impact of the work across multiple groups of community members

Our goal is to incorporate these lessons learned into our ongoing nationwide coalition-building efforts. Through our Sharing the Model initiative, MEDA supports community agencies to build capacity, enhance programming and expand services. We intend to create a *promotoras* module for Sharing the Model, designed to help organizations rooted in historically marginalized communities to spark the development of their own outreach worker programs. Given the successes of the *promotoras* program, we want to make knowledge of this resource accessible to groups that stand to gain from its adoption.

The support from JPMorgan Chase has been integral to elevating the *promotoras* as an essential community resource during COVID-19. We look forward to growing the *promotoras* program in 2021, in order to meet the challenges of the pandemic and recovery, deepen our impact with our Latino families and pursue a more equitable future for all community members.

"Despite all the challenges in this country, [at MEDA] I've found a safe place to do what I like to do: serve my Latino community."

PROMOTORAS
TEAM
MEMBER



ABOUT THE MISSION ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AGENCY

MISSION

ROOTED IN SAN FRANCISCO'S MISSION DISTRICT, MEDA IS ADVANCING A NATIONAL EQUITY MOVEMENT BY BUILDING LATINO PROSPERITY, COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP AND CIVIC POWER.

VISION

WE ENVISION GENERATIONS OF LATINO FAMILIES CHOOSING WHERE TO CALL HOME, THRIVING ECONOMICALLY, SUCCEEDING IN LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES, AND LEADING POLICY AND SOCIAL CHANGE TOWARD A MORE EQUITABLE SOCIETY.

VALUES

EQUITY + ACTIVATION + AUDACITY + TOGETHERNESS + IMPACT

EXTERNAL SOURCES

2018 AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY, 5-YEAR AVERAGES

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ELIZABETH FERNANDEZ AND NICHOLAS WEILER, "INITIAL RESULTS OF MISSION DISTRICT COVID-19 TESTING ANNOUNCED." UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA, SAN FRANCISCO WEBSITE, MAY 4 2020.
SOCIAL VULNERABILITY INDEX (SVI), CENSUS-TRACT LEVEL DATA FOR SAN FRANCISCO COUNTY, U.S. CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL & PREVENTION WEBSITE.

NICHOLAS WEILER, "INEQUALITY FUELED COVID-19 TRANSMISSION IN SAN FRANCISCO'S MISSION DISTRICT, SAYS NEW STUDY." UCSF WEBSITE, JUNE 18 2020

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