

Overview

Since 1994, Little Village Environmental Justice Organization has strived to build a sustainable community that promotes the healthy development of youth and families, provide economic justice, and practice participatory democracy and self-determination.

Mission

“The mission of LVEJO is to organize with our community to accomplish environmental justice in Little Village and achieve the self-determination of immigrant, low-income, and working-class families.” – LVEJO website



Constituency

- Latinxs (Mexican & Mexican Americans)
- LGBTQ
- Relative Caregivers
- Homeless
- Individuals with Disabilities
- Immigrants/Undocumented
- Formerly Incarcerated

Local Conditions & Critical Issues Impacting 0-5 Childhood Health in Chicago

Air Quality

Due to two former coal-fired power plants that closed in 2012.

Devastating Impact of Structural Racism

Which exacerbates gang activity and violence on youth and children.

Lack of Healthy Alternatives for Youth and Children

Such as green and recreational space and programming.

Youth Unemployment

Including lack of job and career training programs.

Lack of Accessible, Affordable, and Quality Child Daycare & Early Childhood Development Programs

South Chicago community members specify a lack of affordable childcare as a contributor to high stress, which could further contribute to mental illness.³

Displacement & Gentrification

Poor City Design of the Built Environment

Including harmful land use choices.

“The city put a grammar school in [an industrial corridor district]...and there was no other place to put the school...Then the industry next door to it decided to expand and they’re going to have between 500 and 900 trucks a day...coming next door to the school. And there was no consideration for health and environment. You’re talking about five year olds who are going to be growing up with this air pollution and taking years out of their life.”

“We fought for 15 years to get a new park, but we have about 5,000 children under the age of 5 that live within a quarter mile of this brand-new park, yet the park isn’t considering children’s’ activities [or] programming for children, and so it becomes very problematic when you have this beautiful brand new park, but it doesn’t have the programs that it needs to meet the needs of the community around it.”

–Kim Wasserman-Nieto, Executive Director

Key Indicators of Childhood Health in Chicago

5.1/100,000 residents

is the average rate for **intentionally violent deaths** between 2007-09. There are many reasons behind the increase in violence, including the poor economic climate, stress from a lack of basic needs, gangs and unsupervised youth.³ Depression, stress, and anxiety rates are also high, including trauma, which usually go untreated.



Distance and lack of park space have kids playing in the alleys and streets, preventing children in the Little Village neighborhood from engaging in many physical and recreational activities, including after-school programs and organized sports.¹

49.8%



of children 5-17 in the University of Chicago Medical Service Area are **overweight/obese** or fall into the 85th percentile (or higher) for BMI.⁴

12.8% of children 0-17 in the University of Chicago Medical Service Area have **asthma** and 147.7 per 10,000 children 0-17 are hospitalized per year due to asthma.²

4.9%

of children (0-17) are **uninsured** in Chicago.²

Current Wellness & Safety Efforts

- **Air Pollution & Pedestrian Traffic Injury Prevention**
Examine the influx of diesel truck facilities in the neighborhood and the impact on community health/environment/economy, including safety issues (due to rise in accidents with bicyclists and pedestrians).
- **Redevelopment of Vacant Land (“Brownfields”)**
Identify, clean up and convert vacant properties that may have contaminated the ground into healthy community-use spaces (e.g., gardens, solar project, green open spaces)
- **Water Justice**
Improve the community’s access to city information related to lead testing and lead concentrations in community drinking water, with a focus on water sources at daycares, schools, and public facilities
- **Park Programming and Services for Children 0 to 5**
“How are we ensuring that [children] have as pristine of an environment as possible in our community? [So] our little ones develop not only healthy habits, but they are developing in general.”



Community Defined “Best Practices” to Improve Childhood Health

Intergenerational Community Organizing

“...we cross the gamut from littlest to oldest...anything our community suggests within the constraints of the law, anything that our community wants to do we pretty much will do it. We really empower our folks to feel that their voice, their ideas are valid, and there is no one expert.”

Leadership Development with Transferable Skills

Develop community leaders with organizing skills that transfer to other social justice arenas beyond environmental justice, such as immigration, public education reform, etc. This leads to empowerment.

LVEJO Accomplishments in Wellness & Safety

- **Environmental Justice**

Mapped the number of coal power plants within a two mile radius of day care centers, elementary schools, and high schools to demonstrate the impact on both the environment and on children's health. This helped shut down two of the dirtiest coal plants in the nation and the last two coal power plants in a metropolitan area.

- **Park Advocacy Campaign**

Won the first public park that was community designed to be built in Little Village in over 75 years. Currently working on getting a community center (better than a field house), with programing for 0-5 and elderly in specific.

- **Youth Public Transportation Access**

Won the reestablishment of the 31st street bus that increased youth access via transportation (bus) before and after school.

- **Healthy Food Access - Garden Campaign**

Built a community garden for all ages.

"We had a huge summer program for children 0-5 around learning to grow food, where does your food come from, taking a seed and planting it, and then eating the food that you grow. We really started to target our little ones around the question of food...When they go into Chicago Public Schools [CPS], their eating habits change greatly...they are introduced to CPS lunches and...they want to eat the burgers and pizza...so we recognize that there's some serious work that needs to be done, to not only change the policy of CPS and get [children] better food, but also get [children] thinking about their food choices so that they can be the biggest advocate... We did a lot of work around focusing on our littlest ones, and understanding the food cycle."

Allies/Partnerships Working on Children's Health

- El Valor – Chicago, IL <https://elvalor.org/>
- Little Village Boys & Girls Club of Chicago – Chicago, IL <https://bgcc.org/little-village-club/>

Website: <http://lvejo.org/>

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Telephone: 773-762-6991

Email: office@lvejo.org

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/lvejo2020/>

Twitter: @LVEJO

Instagram: @lvejo20

Tumblr: <http://lvejo.tumblr.com/>

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCRkVy05eM5z3rARoNp-irNQ/videos>



LMU|LA
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 **the praxis project**

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