LALDEF has completed another year at the Welcome House located in Trenton. We have had the privilege of offering a variety of services to Latinos and immigrants in the Mercer County area. These services include ESL classes, citizenship classes, printing Mercer County ID cards, and our FUTURO mentorship program. We also provide legal guidance for immigration cases on a weekly basis. This year we have strengthened partnerships with other social service agencies in order to ensure that our clients are having their needs met.

We would like to take a moment to acknowledge all of our achievements in 2016. Our English as a Second Language program has served 138 people this year with a new curriculum, including oral exams. This has been possible through all the hard work of over 10 dedicated ELS instructors who volunteer their time every week. We would also like to recognize the great work of the our ESL Program Coordinator, Patrick Thane. ESL Classes wrapped up the winter semester on Monday, December 12th. Registration for the next session beginning in January is filling up quickly.

To date we have issued over 10,000 ID cards! Twice a week people from all over come to LALDEF to obtain a Mercer County Community ID Card. This year we also issued ID cards at a few mobile sessions across the county. Volunteers and staff work tirelessly every week to issue community ID cards at our office and three other locations throughout Mercer County, including: Hightstown Rise, Princeton Public Library, and Covenant Presbyterian Church. Possession of this ID allows individuals otherwise unidentified to access services in their community. We are talking with other community partners about expanding our offerings as the community ID card has gained traction and respect within the community.

Looking at the next year we have so much work ahead of us. We are currently preparing for income tax preparation season. This means getting volunteers trained and certified, preparing our office, and marketing of these free services. As a VITA site we prepare over 200 free income tax returns each year. Next year we will also have several health screening sessions at our office. In the past screenings have helped to identify high cholesterol and blood pressure in individuals. As part of our efforts to increase preventative care in the Hispanic community we are also partnering with agencies to provide health care enrollment services.

The needs in the Hispanic community cannot be met by one single agency and we are thankful to all of our community partners. LALDEF is constantly evolving to provide the best services to our clients and assure that their needs are met. We look forward to continuing to serve our community in 2017!
Dear Friends,

Imagine being an immigrant in America right now. Are you scared? Do you feel alone? What can you expect in the coming months?

Focus.

The single most important thing that I want to tell you... is that our work is more important than ever before. We can’t do this without continued support from friends like you. LALDEF was established in 2004 to fight injustice, educate communities, and support immigrant families. The recent presidential election has left our nation with a sense of uncertainty. Our clients don’t know what to expect and we must find the answers.

Lately Casa de Bienvenida (headquarters) has been insanely busy, as you can imagine. This year we logged over 3,500 volunteer hours from dedicated individuals. Since opening our new office doors in 2013 we have seen over 4,000 unique clients and issued over 10,000 Mercer County Community Identification Cards. We foresee our client numbers increasing significantly within the first year of the new presidency. To charge forward and plow through the increased workload we have increased capacity and added an office manager. Our executive level focus has been on ramping up our advocacy efforts and educating the community. Taking charge and voicing our concerns will allow us to form the right partnerships to promote change. We must stand for the immigrant community and voice their concerns. We will not remain silent.

Support.

As a tax exempt 501(c)(3) organization, our mission is to defend the rights of the Latin American community, facilitate its access to health care and education, and advance cross-cultural understanding within the region. YOU can help us continue our fight! Your support will allow our immigrant community to continue to benefit from the myriad of services that we provide, from ESL classes to legal representation in immigration courts.

By investing in LALDEF you are giving a voice to thousands of immigrants in the Mercer County area. We hope you will join us in our efforts!

Thanks,

Leticia Fraga
LALDEF Board Chair

A MESSAGE FROM OUR BOARD CHAIR

Imagining... Imagine. This year LALDEF was able to assist over 25 individuals to attain citizenship. It is a lengthy process in which families have to apply and practice for their interview. One of our volunteers, David Anderson, teaches/coaches applicants for their interview. When David was 7 years old he lived in Puerto Rico for 4 years and was able to learn Spanish. He used his skills to teach ESL at Bethany Presbyterian church. After the church closed its program, David started teaching ESL at LALDEF, and shortly afterward, was asked to assist in preparing individuals for citizenship interviews. David wanted to share the story of Milvia Perez, a native of Nicaragua. David says, “I worked with her in June and July. As are most of the candidates, Milvia was highly motivated.” David continues, “She studied the civics questions thoroughly, and came to our sessions prepared to answer all questions perfectly.” David has helped many immigrants with their naturalization process. It is a stressful and intense process but he reassures them and provides them with the encouragement they need to walk into the test prepared. David states, “The eagerness with which the candidates who come through LALDEF prepare for their interview should give us all a greater appreciation for the value of American citizenship. The value of the citizenship increases in proportion to the numbers of all the hard-working and serious immigrants who apply for citizenship, following in the footsteps of our own predecessors. Their efforts bring honor to this country.”

This year LALDEF helped over 25 individuals become United States citizens!

A BRIGHT FUTURE

In 2016 the students from the FUTURO program attended various skill and team building events. Through the mentorship program FUTURO students are able to see different types of jobs and careers available to them. This year FUTURO visited Wells Fargo to take a closer look at the banking industry. The students also participated in subject specific tutoring and SAT preparation throughout the year. College applications have been submitted and scholarship applications are underway. They are routinely motivated and encouraged by the program coordinator, Ana Obika. In our current cohort one of the students, Steven Pauc, was accepted into the esteemed QuestBridge program. In sharing his experience he said, “I am a Guatemalan student residing in New Jersey. I came here at the age of twelve, and currently seek to become a politician to serve the Latino community. FUTURO has been a great experience. Since my membership began in my junior year of high school FUTURO has guided me through the arduous and intimidating process of applying to college. Personally, I am grateful for the opportunities at hand, and I can safely state that the hard work does have a rightful reward.”