

Of Campus & Commerce

By Nick DeMatteo



Providing comprehensive services to thousands of New Jersey residents for over 40 years, The Puerto Rican Association for Human Development (PRAHD) is dedicated to “developing human potential and promoting self-sufficiency through programs designed to improve the social, economic health and educational status of the community in a culturally sensitive environment.”

Serving Middlesex County and the surrounding area from headquarters located in Perth Amboy, PRAHD

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Yvonne Lopez,
Executive Director and CEO of PRAHD

operates 10 programs that target education, housing, benefits access, youth development, preventative health, senior services, and respite home care for individuals with developmental disabilities. The organizational vision is to “empower the individual to reach their highest potential and to participate meaningfully in their community.”

In this capacity, the staff and management team at PRAHD must possess a diverse skill set, be extremely adaptive and demonstrate a high level of professionalism. In order to maintain a vibrant organization and foster the personal growth of the staff, Yvonne Lopez, executive director and CEO at PRAHD, believes that a structured, well-planned and on-going professional development program is an absolute necessity.

To facilitate this, PRAHD partners with the Corporate Education and Training team at Middlesex County College to provide professional development workshops for its staff in Perth Amboy on a monthly basis. Workshop schedules are developed based on need and cover diverse

topics such as developing good management skills, teambuilding, problem-solving, business writing and

verbal communications. As a community service, PRAHD opens these workshops to associated local organizations. The PRAHD workshops are frequently attended by staff from organizations such as the Raritan Bay YMCA and others in Perth Amboy. Utilizing the NJBIA Basic Skills Training grant program, MCC is able to provide these programs for PRAHD as grant funded events.

The organizational mission at PRAHD is to provide community service to residents in every stage of life. For the very young, PRAHD operates the Mi Escuelita Preschool Early Childhood Center as part of the Perth Amboy Board of Education Public Schools. Operating five full days per week throughout the school year, credentialed teachers lead 75 students in a bilingual and bicultural environment. PRAHD’s Senior Services Center provides case management, individual health insurance counseling, transportation, assistance with benefits access applications, language translation and interpretation, workshops on wellness, legal, health, housing and insurance; among other services to seniors throughout Middlesex County.

PRAHD works to improve the lives of area residents in many ways. Among its most recent achievements is the implementation of a pre-apprenticeship training program. In collaboration with the Carpenter Contractor Trust, PRAHD developed a program to recruit, screen, and provide preliminary training for candidates wishing to enter the carpenter’s apprenticeship program. This program is designed to provide candidates a preview of the carpentry curriculum and a vision of the carpenter’s life. This program has become recognized nationally as a “Best Practices” model for social service organizations seeking to create career opportunities for their constituency.

Providing services across such a broad spectrum of needs requires dynamic leadership and an effective organization. Middlesex County College is proud to play a role in helping PRAHD to grow and remain a valuable service provider in our community.

Of Campus & Commerce is a column written by MCC’s director of Corporate Education and Training, Nick DeMatteo. It addresses training issues at New Jersey’s businesses and organizations. His email is NDeMatteo@middlesexcc.edu.