

Immigrant Women Build Power

Technology Helps Us Share Our Stories and Do Our Work

Damaris Estrada

BEFORE YOU READ:

1. In this article, the author talks about women who have experienced domestic violence. Read the caption under the photo below.
2. What is *outreach*? What does it mean to *reach out* to people?

My First Day

I am an immigrant woman from Guatemala. In Guatemala, I worked as a community organizer for 30 years. Now, I work as a community organizer in the U.S. I work with other immigrants, especially Mayan women. We



No More Violence



In this photo, women protest violence against women. If you or someone you know has experienced domestic violence, you and they can get help. Visit <https://www.thehotline.org/> or call 1-800-799-SAFE (7233). Photo by UN Women from [Flickr](#) CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

support women who have domestic violence or immigration issues. We *reach out* to them and connect them to resources. We help them become leaders. As leaders, they *reach out* to more women and immigrants. In this way, we help each other. We feel solidarity. We are not victims. We all have power.

I first came to the organization looking for legal support as an immigrant. I had just arrived in this country. I felt alone and I didn't know how to navigate it.

I remember the first day I came to the office. The office was on the second floor. To get there, you had to go up some stairs. On each step, there was a word of encouragement. So when you reached the top of the stairs, you would have enough courage to ask for help. You would have the courage to change your life. That is what happened to me when I first came in.

Becoming a Leader

I joined other women and I received a training. I was ecstatic. I did not want to leave! First, I was a general member. Then I was a volunteer. I participated in every training available. I learned so much. I discovered my love for leadership. Now, I am on staff. I do *outreach*, provide trainings, and develop leaders.

Hearing Women's Stories

Technology is an essential tool that we use in our work. For example, when we *reach out* to other women, our goal is to have a deep connection with them. One way we do this is we listen to their stories. We keep a record of their stories. We need certain computer skills so we can save the stories of our community. We train our leaders to use the computer for this purpose.

When we know a woman's story, we know why she came here to heal with us. Her story can help other women. We learn we are not alone.

Technology in Our Work

Also, computer skills are valuable in all of our day-to-day work. We use a database and spreadsheets to keep track of our members. We use slideshows to present reports and do education. We use digital maps to track where we have done *outreach* and where we need to do more *outreach*. We use Zoom for online meetings, and WhatsApp or TikTok for communication.

Information is Power; Fake News is Not!

We do research online to see what members are hearing in the news and on social media. From this, we create classes to help the women learn how to analyze if the information is real or fake. Sometimes there is incorrect information (or "fake news") that makes the community feel afraid or confused.

Information is power, but we must be careful to find information that is true and accurate. For instance, our community members use TikTok. TikTok can be a good tool for sharing information.



But it can also spread fake news. We help our community members figure out how to tell the difference.

The world is complicated and can be confusing. So, more than ever, we need to be organized to defend and preserve our cultural values and build our power.

AFTER YOU READ:

1. According to the author, what helped her on her first day visiting the organization to get help?
2. How does her relationship to the organization change over time? Describe her different roles.
3. What are some of the key ways that organizers use digital tools in their work?
4. In pairs or small groups, share how you feel after reading this story by Damaris Estrada. Read the story on pp. 26-27 by Deejo Jibril and do the third activity under "After You Read."
5. What words of encouragement would you want to see on the stairs?

Damaris Estrada is an ESL student and a community organizer in Oakland, California. She is passionate about working with Latina women, politics, theater, and writing poetry.