

# Evaluation of Abriendo Puertas Executive Summary



**Abriendo Puertas** is a comprehensive 10-session parent leadership and advocacy training program developed for low income, primarily Spanish-speaking parents with children ages 0 to 5. This unique train-the-trainer program draws from the real-life experiences of its participants, with curricular content that builds from their cultural strengths. Course facilitators from the community enhance parents' learning by presenting materials in an interactive way, encouraging involvement and discussion. In the pilot program, classes were conducted in Spanish at seven sites in varied Latino communities in Los Angeles County. This summary presents findings from a rigorous evaluation of the pilot program examining how—if at all—involvement in Abriendo Puertas (AP) is associated with changes in participants' knowledge, thoughts, or behaviors.

## Key Findings

Abriendo Puertas participants reported *significant increases* in their:

- confidence about parenting skills
- knowledge about and access to available health services
- social support and social connections in the community
- community involvement
- actions to encourage others to vote, especially on behalf of children

## Evaluation Design

The evaluation included both quantitative and qualitative data analyses—collected through surveys, questionnaires, field notes, and focus groups at the beginning and end of the program, and at a follow-up meeting. While 199 parents participated in the Abriendo Puertas program, 109 completed all parts of the evaluation. These 109 evaluation participants



This evaluation was conducted by Margaret Bridges, Ph.D., Shana Cohen, M.A., and Bruce Fuller, Ph.D. at UC Berkeley; and Veronica Velez, M.A. at UCLA.



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*“Before Abriendo Puertas I didn’t know how to really get involved in the parent committee at my child’s school. I didn’t know I had rights to demand things because I am not from this country. I would arrive at my child’s schools with such insecurity about whether I should or shouldn’t be there. After Abriendo Puertas I know how to navigate the system, and I now go to these meetings.”*

—Nindi

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were deemed representative of the program participants as a whole; they did not significantly vary from the entire group on education level, household income, age, marital status, or cultural heritage. This executive summary is focused on the representative group of 109 people with complete evaluation data.

## Participants

The majority of participants (70%) were born in Mexico, with 12% born in the United States, and 16% born in Central and South American countries. Participants ranged in age from 17- to 48-years-old, with an average age of 32, representative of the growing community of Latino parents with young children. Most were married (approximately 70%), and had two children—on average—living in the home. More than half of these low-income parents had completed high school (57%), with most reporting that they had completed some additional coursework—such as parenting or English classes—often taught at Head Start Centers, the sites for three of seven Abriendo Puertas programs.

## Results

Participants reported *significant increases* in their knowledge and positive changes in their thoughts and behaviors after participating in Abriendo Puertas. These changes will be reviewed across parenting confidence, community resources and services, and community engagement, and discussed in terms of their effect sizes (see Figure 1). Effect sizes are simple calculations of the magnitude of Abriendo Puertas’ benefits for participants, allowing us to compare these magnitudes to other interventions. For example, lowering class sizes for elementary school students in poor communities can raise student achievement by about 0.20 of a standard deviation—considered a small effect. The benefits on cognitive growth for young children who attend a quality preschool can rise to 0.35 of a standard deviation—considered a moderate effect size.

**Parenting Confidence.** Abriendo Puertas was focused largely on facilitating positive, supportive parenting. When asked about their confidence in regards to parenting practices, participants reported a significant increase in confidence after participating. This increase was .48 of a standard deviation, considered a moderate effect. Participants discussed how the child development information built their confidence. According to Iris, “After Abriendo Puertas, I have much more security and confidence in how to raise my child... I am better able to observe

**and understand his development, based on his age and comparing it to the standards we were provided.”**

**Community Resources and Services.**

The majority of information provided on social services was new to participants, or—if they were aware of the program—they had not known they were eligible for it, or how to access it. Results indicate a significant increase in participants’ knowledge of health services—including MediCal, Healthy Families, and Healthy Kids. This increase was .65 of a standard deviation, considered a large effect. Indeed, the majority of participants cited the healthcare information as being some of the most important and useful resources discussed. Lizette’s comments best exemplify this: “The resources provided [by Abriendo Puertas] are very necessary to know. I was able to obtain MediCal for my daughter. When I went to the social worker after taking Abriendo Puertas she didn’t have to explain [MediCal] because I already knew. My husband asked me ‘Where did you learn all this information?’ I tell him [it was] the classes I took at Abriendo Puertas.” The healthcare information was reported to have an exponential effect, given the extent to which it was shared with, and utilized by, others.

**Community Engagement.**

Participants reported that their social support—the average number of people they turned to when they needed help or advice—increased

significantly over the course of the AP program. This increase was .27 of a standard deviation, considered a moderate effect. In addition to strengthening family relationships, participants identified building community connections by providing social support to extended family members, neighbors, and even strangers. For example, Roselia recounted, “Abriendo Puertas helps me help my neighbors and friends. I am asked about the information I was provided, and I am able to help.” Participants’ reports of their community connections significantly increased, reflecting their talking to more people in the community more often. This increase was .11 of a standard deviation, considered a small effect. Part of the increase in connections reveals their significantly greater involvement in community activities: going to the library, helping out friends and neighbors, attending church, and volunteering at community organizations. This increase in involvement was about .20 of a standard deviation, considered a small effect.

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*“I wasn’t use to reading to my child.... Now, after Abriendo Puertas, I read to him much more frequently and I try to be more animated. I have also been helping him more with his homework. His teacher is telling me that he has been advancing in his grade since I started doing this.”*

—Edelina

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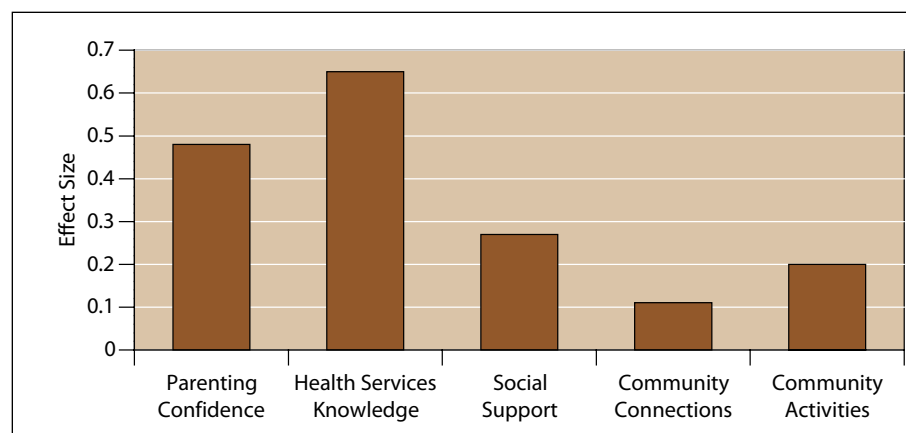
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*“Before Abriendo Puertas I didn’t even step a foot into the library; I now go there all the time...I now take my children frequently to the library. There were things about the library that I was completely unaware of—like books in Spanish.”*

—Nayeli

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**FIGURE 1.** The Effect Sizes of Abriendo Puertas Indices.





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*"I have a new awareness and knowledge that not only helps me but others as well, after Abriendo Puertas. For example, I now know about different school services, what a child should be learning developmentally, and how to fight for someone's rights.*

*I often get asked by my neighbors for support... I accompanied a parent to an IEP meeting at her child's school, and was able to help her support her daughter."*

*—Felipa*

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For more information about Abriendo Puertas/Opening Doors please contact:  
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While participants reported more connections and activities, their other involvement—assessed by their recall of attending meetings, rallies, and community events—increased, but the change was not statistically significant. Interestingly, participants wanted significantly more involvement and felt that getting involved was significantly easier than they had previously thought. According to Rosalba, *"Before when I would go talk to my child's teacher, my legs would shake. Now they don't shake as much. Abriendo Puertas has given me so much confidence to speak up and have my voice heard."*

One of the ways Abriendo Puertas participants got involved in their communities was through voting. All who were eligible to cast ballots in the recent presidential election voted. Participants' social connections extended to their voting activities; almost three-quarters (72%) of participants encouraged others in their communities to vote, and vote on behalf of children. As Lorena explained, *"Abriendo Puertas opened doors for me by giving me this information [about rights] and confidence. I have to raise my hand in order to be heard. Now I communicate more by writing letters and participating politically."*

## Conclusions

Participants in Abriendo Puertas displayed significant increases in their: 1) confidence about parenting; 2) knowledge about available health services; 3) social support and connections in the community;

4) community involvement; and 5) encouragement of others to vote. The effect sizes for several of these increases are moderate to large, on par or greater than those found in other intervention programs. These effect sizes are notable, and this evaluation is being used to improve the curriculum to strengthen the program's impact. While the long-term effects of program involvement are not yet known, it is clear that intervening early in children's lives through improving parenting, increasing access to health services, and building strong, involved communities helps children and saves money in the long run.

Latino families represent a large and rapidly growing demographic in the United States. This parenting program—that is culturally relevant to Latinos—is important both because of the large potential audience, and for the evidence of its efficacy. Abriendo Puertas is unique and effective in providing resources and information to program participants while building on cultural norms that support the further dissemination within the larger community, adding to the collective neighborhood impact. Abriendo Puertas demonstrates the value of developing a parenting program that capitalizes on the strengths of a community, adapting the program to the resources available in that community.