

IDRA and ARISE Expand Servant Leadership to Advocacy and Action in South Texas

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This chapter chronicles the story of how the nonprofit intermediary organization Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA) and a community organization, A Resource in Serving Equality (ARISE) Adelante, also known as ARISE, worked together to expand servant leadership among Mexican American immigrant families living in the Rio Grande Valley of South Texas. With their strong focus on equity, IDRA and ARISE embraced and then expanded the traditional 10 characteristics of servant leadership to include advocacy and action. This chapter describes the history and background of both organizations, relates the work of these two organizations to servant leadership, shows how they were able to expand servant leadership to advocacy and action, provides lessons learned, and discusses next steps for how other organizations might apply these additional two characteristics to increase equity.

INTRODUCTION

IDRA and ARISE (also called ARISE Adelante) have long embodied the concept of servant leadership first described by Robert K. Greenleaf in his 1970 publication, *The Servant as Leader* (1970). The organizations' work in distributive leadership and shared family leadership (Chavkin, 2017; Montemayor, 2007a; Montemayor & Chavkin, 2016, 2020, 2021) follows a strong parallel to the tenets of servant

leadership as they continue to develop, research, and refine shared family leadership with immigrant families in communities experiencing poverty, isolation, and lack of educational resources.

Each of the 10 characteristics outlined by Larry Spears (2010) is at the center of the work of IDRA and ARISE. This chapter explores the use of the 10 traditional characteristics of servant leadership and then shows how IDRA and ARISE working together from an equity framework have expanded the original 10 to 12 characteristics by adding advocacy and action, which are critical to equity work. For sustainability, equity work must include processes that move diverse people and communities forward. Advocacy and action are crucial additional characteristics of servant leadership.

The case study of this partnership between IDRA and ARISE is told through the voices and actions of strong immigrant women who believe in servant leadership and demonstrate that it can make a difference in the lives of children and families. By adding advocacy and action components to their servant leadership, these immigrant women improved not only their own communities but the communities of many others.

ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND OF IDRA AND ARISE

IDRA is an independent, non-profit organization whose mission is to achieve equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college. IDRA strengthens and transforms public education by providing dynamic training; useful research, evaluation, and frameworks for action; timely policy analyses and advocacy; transformational community engagement and innovative materials and programs. The organization is committed to an asset-based philosophy, respecting the knowledge and skills of the individuals we work with and building on the strengths of the students and parents in their schools.

IDRA developed its Family Leadership in Education model out of its rich history of almost 50 years of work with families and communities. The model (IDRA, 2022) is embodied in grassroots organizations with effective community outreach, particularly among recent immigrant families. The model employs the approach of servant leadership with its focus on Greenleaf's central concept, "The servant-leader is servant first" (Greenleaf, 1970, p. 27).

The 1980s saw the beginning of the IDRA Family Leadership in Education approach. Using funding from the U.S. Department of Education, IDRA held training sessions across Texas for parents of children in bilingual education. The approach was different because it honored participants' language and culture and focused on family engagement in non-traditional ways. Key components included family participation, bilingualism, and the understanding that parents influence their children's education.

Since those early years, IDRA has continued to facilitate family leadership with a focus on its model, Family Leadership in Education. Funders have included: the Ford Foundation, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the National Center on Immigrant Integration Policy, the U.S. Department of Education, and many other federal and state agencies. The list of programs and partnerships is long and includes Mobilization for Equity, Families United for Education: Getting Organization (FUEGO), the federally-funded Texas IDRA Parent Information and Resource Center (PIRC), PTA Comunitario and the current Education CAFE (Montemayor & Chavkin, 2016; Cortez, 2015; Montemayor, 2007b, 2010).

IDRA has served as an intermediary organization helping grassroots community-based organizations (CBOs) to achieve their educational equity goals. IDRA has had a strong commitment to working with immigrant families in the south Texas *colonias*. Colonias are some of the most economically challenged

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