



In partnership with members of the Pueblo and Adams communities and led by The Curious Company, Caring for Colorado Foundation and the Colorado Health Foundation commissioned a Human-Centered Design project over the course of eight months in 2019. The project sought to inspire new and innovative solutions that meet Latino youth where they are and to develop a culturally responsive, dignified resolution to some of the challenges they experience related to their sexual and reproductive health. This executive summary highlights the project’s process, insights, and recommendations.

Project Background

Colorado continues to lead advances in reproductive health care and justice work; as such, it is critical to move beyond “one size fits all” programming for all populations. Latinas make up a significant part of Colorado’s population, yet their voices, needs, and desires are not often incorporated into efforts to address reproductive health care needs across the state. It is critical to ensure relevant, culturally responsive solutions that meet the needs of Latinas.

While focused on reproductive health care, this project is fundamentally about equity and justice. High pregnancy and birth rates are not the problems, but symptoms of failures to meet the needs of Latino youth. Future solutions must work upstream to cultivate strength, autonomy and resilience.

Methodology

This project used Human-Centered Design, a problem-solving approach that involves communities in developing solutions to benefit them. Rather than designing the project using assumptions about Latino youth (particularly Latinas) – who they are, what they care about, what challenges they face, and what solutions they need – we engaged them in the process in order to learn from them directly. For this specific project, the core team included community leaders and organizers from the two communities in Adams and Pueblo counties, and the design team included expertise in cultural anthropology and behavioral science.

Conducted in two phases from March to November 2019, the project focused on the following question:

How might we understand the reproductive health needs and desires of young Latina women (18-24 years old) in Adams and Pueblo Counties, and design with them relevant, culturally responsive ways to support them in meeting those needs?

During the project’s **Inspiration Phase (March to July 2019)**, the project team conducted interviews in the cities of Pueblo (seat of Pueblo County) and Thornton, Commerce City, and Federal Heights (Adams County) to learn the assets, challenges, and aspirations of Latina women who live in these communities.

The **Ideation Phase (August to November 2019)** involved developing initial solution ideas to meet the needs identified from the interviews, and sharing the ideas with the community members in Pueblo and Adams counties. Through an iterative process, these members helped improve the initial ideas.

Summary of Findings

Inspiration Phase

During this phase, the project team interviewed 104 people over four months, with primary focus on talking with Latina women aged 18-24 years old, but also including Latino men in the same age range, as well as parents, caregivers and influencers of young adults. Most people interviewed identified as Latina/o, Hispanic, Chicana/o, or Mexican, and the majority of youth interviewed were between 18-22 years old. Interviews started broadly by asking participants to talk about their lives, explore life goals and values, and ended with conversations about sexuality, relationships, and contraception.

Themes consistently discussed during the interviews coalesced into six areas of insight:

COMMUNITY, FAMILY AND CULTURAL IDENTITY: Latino identity provides many young people with a strong sense of community and pride, but also comes with a unique set of tensions, many of which are exacerbated by the negative national narrative targeting the Latino community and immigrants.

SUPPORTING YOUNG PEOPLE: Young people crave guidance and validation from friends, families, teachers, mentors and even strangers; however, the overwhelming sense is that too few adults show up consistently, constructively, or compassionately for Latino youth in Adams and Pueblo counties. When “champions” do show up for young people, there is a measurable and meaningful impact on their lives.

FUTURE PATHWAYS: There are few aspects of transitioning into adulthood that are more daunting for a young person than identifying a path to pursue for their future. Navigating that passage requires tremendous support, which many young Latina/os typically do not receive because of systemic, cultural, and individual family reasons. This means that youth bear a tremendous burden to figure out how to navigate adolescence on their own, and few feel confident that they know how to do so.

INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS: Gender and cultural norms make it hard for Latinas to assert their needs or find their voices, particularly in intimate relationships. A lack of agency and autonomy leaves young Latinas particularly vulnerable to unhealthy relationships.

TALKING ABOUT SEX WITH ADULTS: In the best of situations, talking about sex is awkward. As in other areas of their lives, youth shared that most adults in their lives are not showing up consistently to guide them, despite wanting them to do so. Many adults agreed that they are not providing reliable guidance.

SEEKING CONTRACEPTION AND CARE: Related to the lack of open and honest discussion with adults about healthy sexuality, many youth expressed shame, stigma and misperceptions regarding pregnancy prevention. Clinic staff and providers can be strong advocates for young women, but just getting to the clinic takes a lot for youth, and positive experiences with providers are largely inconsistent.

Ideation Phase and Findings

Informed by the six areas of insight during the Inspiration Phase, the second phase of the project, Ideation Phase, focused on designing solutions around four meta themes:

KEY THEMES

Self + Autonomy

BIG WHAT, little how

The Generational Effect

Hunger for More
Connection + Support

DESIGN OPPORTUNITY

VOICE + POWER IN RELATIONSHIPS

How might we support young Latinas to step into their power, use their voices and advocate for their needs in relationships?

FUTURE PATHWAYS

How might we help more Latinx youth clearly envision a wider variety of pathways available to them and make clear how they can pursue them?

CONVERSATIONS ABOUT SEX

How might we make it easier for Latinx parents and caregivers to talk about sex, developing bodies, healthy sexuality, and relationships with the young people in their care?

HUMAN CONNECTION + SUPPORT

How might we make it easier for Latinx youth to find and for champions to provide the kind of human connection and support youth need to truly thrive?

The design opportunities involved over 300 ideas that became 12 thematic concept areas, which the team shared with the community members involved in this project in Pueblo and Adams counties. The team asked these community members about how to improve upon these initial ideas by affirming what is working and improve or let go of what is not. Iterative feedback from the community created new and more promising possibilities, and eliminated others. Over the four months of this project phase, the 300 initial ideas eventually distilled into one single recommendation.



Key Findings from Ideation Phase:

- Youth want to feel and be safe to talk about what they are dealing with in their lives.
 - Feeling “safe” focused more on having experiences with people that build trust and confidence, rather than having a safe physical space.¹
- Youth and caregivers want structure and a skilled facilitator to guide face-to-face conversations and support around tough topics.
- Exposure to different people, perspectives, and experiences creates new possibilities for the future.
- Discussing scenarios about real-life situations with other people who have a similar experience is powerful. Co-learning with and from one’s peers builds confidence and connection.
- A strong brand that signals it is specifically for the Latino community is a powerful draw.
- Content that is playful or gamified makes it easier to engage around tough topics, including communication, healthy relationships, and sex.

¹ Youth identified a “safe” person as someone who: physically looks like them (Latino/a); engages in conversations that reflect their reality; doesn’t require them to be too vulnerable too quickly; and builds trust over time.

SOMOS



SOMOS is a Latina-led movement powered by togetherness that gathers people in the Latino community to have meaningful conversations about important topics in young people's lives that can be tricky to talk about. Through high-energy group sessions, participants share perspectives and learn from each other. Youth and caregivers alike build confidence and skills related to healthy relationships, personal autonomy, and emotional & sexual health.

SOMOS offers two-hour sessions for three different groups within the Latino community: youth 12-14 years old, youth 15-18 years old, and adult parents or caregivers. **SOMOS** is not rigidly structured or scripted, but designed to meet busy people where they are, and to be valuable for someone coming to one session or multiple sessions. Sessions are lightly structured to allow the will and interests of the group to set the direction of the session. Using scenarios sourced from the community, facilitators bring up topics for participants to explore in a supportive environment, introduce skills that build confidence and the capacity to navigate a wide range of challenging situations, and provide information and resources for continued learning and support.

For **SOMOS** to be effective, it must:

- Be community-led.
- Be responsive to community needs.
- Build on strengths and assets.
- Allow youth and caregivers to learn with and from peers.
- Create safety and trust.
- Make the program flexible, convenient and easy to join.
- Engage youth and caregivers separately.
- Strongly signal the program is for the Latino community.

SOMOS directly responds to, and was inspired by the Latino community taking a generational approach to support youth. Through facilitated gatherings, **SOMOS** authentically facilitates human connection and support, eases Latino youth and caregivers into challenging conversations, and builds practical skills to support youth navigating adolescence. **SOMOS** breaks the pattern of generational silence around topics essential to the wellbeing (happiness, health, power, and autonomy) of young Latinas.

Path Forward

In honor of, and with fierce dedication to the communities that opened their doors and their lives to us, The Colorado Health Foundation and Caring for Colorado Foundation, through the Colorado Collaborative for Reproductive Health Equity, commit to establishing the path forward for **SOMOS**. The vibrancy and generosity of spirit shared from these community members has profoundly affected all involved in the project. In partnership, we listened, we asked, we iterated. Now, we will build.

Pueblo and Adams County are communities of strength, connection, love and a desire to do better by their youth. **SOMOS** and the other concepts identified through this project will further support these communities in realizing these values for youth. *Mejor Juntos. Adelante.*