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00:00:00,750 --> 00:00:10,050

(Interviewer\_

Immigrant and Refugee-Led Capacity Development Network of Illinois  
IRLCDN CBO spotlight a

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00:00:10,050 --> 00:00:15,450

partnership with the University of Illinois at Chicago Institute on  
Disability and Human Development,

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00:00:15,450 --> 00:00:22,580

and Illinois Department of Human Services IDHS.

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00:00:22,580 --> 00:00:28,460

Centro de Informacion introductions,

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00:00:28,460 --> 00:00:34,460

(Jaime Garcia)

I'm Jaime Garcia and I'm executive director of Centro de Informacion,

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00:00:34,460 --> 00:00:40,220

(Interviewer)

what motivates you to serve your immigrant and refugee communities?

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00:00:40,220 --> 00:00:47,450

(Jaime Garcia)

I'm an immigrant myself. I was born in Mexico and I was brought here  
at the age of nine.

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00:00:47,450 --> 00:00:59,420

And so I went through the whole thing and we moved into an all Anglo  
community.

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00:00:59,420 --> 00:01:07,290

So we really had to sink or swim as far as the learning English and  
and doing everything else.

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00:01:07,290 --> 00:01:17,120

And so, you know, just remember that remembering those experiences  
when when I was able to as an adult,

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00:01:17,120 --> 00:01:31,700

to be able to help here and to make a difference for the immigrants here in Elgin. We were fortunately, I was able to to do it.

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00:01:31,700 --> 00:01:36,800

(Interviewer)

What is the most rewarding part of your work?

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00:01:36,800 --> 00:01:42,800

(Jaime Garcia)

Well, like I said earlier, to make a difference in the life of people. I here again,

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00:01:42,800 --> 00:01:55,940

I remember my parents struggling so much when we first came and with the language, with the culture, with the differences.

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00:01:55,940 --> 00:02:07,130

And and so now if people come and they are helped in in various types of situations,

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00:02:07,130 --> 00:02:13,640

whether people just coming in and needing some food and we have our pantry here.

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00:02:13,640 --> 00:02:17,390

And so we help them by providing the food.

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00:02:17,390 --> 00:02:18,950

And, you know,

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00:02:18,950 --> 00:02:29,960

or if people are coming and they they have a problem with the landlord or they have a problem with their employer and we're able to help them,

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00:02:29,960 --> 00:02:44,060

you know, we're able to see that. But the main and the main thing is when you're down the line, we see how we actually made a difference.

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00:02:44,060 --> 00:02:54,860

When we have like, for example, we have had some people on our board of directors that say and have said,

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00:02:54,860 --> 00:03:01,430

you know, I remember when we came from, whether with Mexico or wherever.

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00:03:01,430 --> 00:03:09,650

And I remember coming with my parents to Centro and how and how we were helped as a family.

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00:03:09,650 --> 00:03:16,490

And and now now that I'm a professional or now that I'm a business person,

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00:03:16,490 --> 00:03:26,330

now that I have whatever that situation may be, now that I can help and I can give back, and therefore, here I am.

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00:03:26,330 --> 00:03:34,090

And so, you know that that in itself is very rewarding and is very nice.

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00:03:34,090 --> 00:03:39,980

Yes. Just yesterday we went to an event a few months ago,

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00:03:39,980 --> 00:03:51,080

we were contacted by one of our donors and supporters who is who owns an insurance company or insurance agency, should I say.

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00:03:51,080 --> 00:04:02,630

And he said, you know, I have some people that are looking for they have this organization.

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00:04:02,630 --> 00:04:08,330

They're looking for someone in need of a car, in need of transportation.

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00:04:08,330 --> 00:04:17,270

They have a car that has been refurbished, but they're they're looking for a worthy person to give it to.

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00:04:17,270 --> 00:04:24,290

And and so we went through the whole thing of identifying someone and so forth.

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00:04:24,290 --> 00:04:34,100

And yesterday or the the event where the car was given to to this gentleman and his wife while he's an older gentleman.

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00:04:34,100 --> 00:04:39,230

And he didn't have very much a lot of transportation.

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00:04:39,230 --> 00:04:47,000

He he works as a painter and and also cleaning businesses and so forth.

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00:04:47,000 --> 00:04:53,180

And he needs transportation in order to get to the to the workplace.

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00:04:53,180 --> 00:04:59,960

And yesterday, when he was presented with a a almost a brand new car,

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00:04:59,960 --> 00:05:05,930

it was two hundred and twelve 2012, a model car with twenty thousand miles on it.

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00:05:05,930 --> 00:05:13,100

But it had been redone completely. The engine and a new paint job and the inside.

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00:05:13,100 --> 00:05:19,520

Was it almost look like a brand new car. And this man was totally overwhelmed.

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00:05:19,520 --> 00:05:22,420

Totally overwhelmed. And he.

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00:05:22,420 --> 00:05:32,900

You know, he started even tearing up a little bit there and just seeing that and not just myself, but all the other people that were there,

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00:05:32,900 --> 00:05:44,720

just seeing his reaction then and his sense of gratitude that now he was going to have reliable transportation to be able to get to and from work.

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00:05:44,720 --> 00:05:50,420

And that was going to make a whale of a difference as far as his life was concerned.

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00:05:50,420 --> 00:06:02,000

So it's moments like this that we say that that keep me going, moments like this to say, yeah, it's worth it.

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00:06:02,000 --> 00:06:06,540

(Interviewer)

What makes the work of your organization unique?

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00:06:06,540 --> 00:06:20,490

(Jaime Garcia)

What makes us unique is that we are the only place in all of northern Kane County, northwest Cook County,

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00:06:20,490 --> 00:06:40,380

southern McHenry County that were immigrants, especially non-English speakers can come to when they have a problem or they have a need and wear it.

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00:06:40,380 --> 00:06:45,810

There is nothing else around and there's nobody else around in this whole area.

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00:06:45,810 --> 00:06:52,410

And we're talking about an area that that has more than one hundred thousand Latinos.

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00:06:52,410 --> 00:07:00,570

And and of course, not all of them are are immigrants and not all of them are non-English speakers.

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00:07:00,570 --> 00:07:14,940

But, you know, over the last five years, they we have been averaging people coming to Central 13,000 different individuals every year.

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00:07:14,940 --> 00:07:24,540

And that makes it unique. And where we, you know, people come to us and we don't advertise, you know,

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00:07:24,540 --> 00:07:33,150

we don't put notices in the newspaper or whatever about come to Centro de Informacion on just the word of mouth.

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00:07:33,150 --> 00:07:38,880

And we do have a Facebook page and we do have our our our Web page.

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00:07:38,880 --> 00:07:44,910

But, you know, people know about Centro.

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00:07:44,910 --> 00:07:55,200

And that's what makes it unique, and we are a one stop shop, meaning if they have like said, we have a pantry here,

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00:07:55,200 --> 00:08:05,910

the bulk, the number, the greatest number of people coming to Centro come for information, referral and advocacy.

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00:08:05,910 --> 00:08:11,220

They have a housing problem. They have a legal problem. They have an employment problem.

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00:08:11,220 --> 00:08:16,560

They're looking for a job or or or work.

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00:08:16,560 --> 00:08:25,050

And I go for this type of situation that's, you know, the bulk number of people come to us, come for that.

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00:08:25,050 --> 00:08:34,320

But we also have immigration services. We are accredited by the Department of Justice to provide immigration services.

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00:08:34,320 --> 00:08:47,040

We have a contract with the we receive funding from the state of Illinois to help people to apply for state benefits.

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00:08:47,040 --> 00:08:54,870

OK, we have parenting classes both in Spanish and in English,

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00:08:54,870 --> 00:09:05,700

and we have a number of different types of workshops and seminars that we present are mostly in Spanish.

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00:09:05,700 --> 00:09:11,040

Many times English speakers take things for granted as far as.

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00:09:11,040 --> 00:09:17,790

So what do you what do you need to do if you are looking for if you have a problem with your

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00:09:17,790 --> 00:09:29,340

landlord or what do you need to do to be able to apply for unemployment compensation?

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00:09:29,340 --> 00:09:38,430

Just yesterday or the day before, we had the Facebook Live, that's Facebook, you know,

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00:09:38,430 --> 00:09:51,900

Facebook live presentation on on Social Security benefits and, you know, things that, you know, for the most part people take for granted.

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00:09:51,900 --> 00:10:00,960

But if you don't know about these various things, then that's why we have things like this during COVID times.

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00:10:00,960 --> 00:10:06,150

Unfortunately, there were a lot of death, a lot of people passing away.

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00:10:06,150 --> 00:10:12,900

And then it was also especially greater within the Latino community.

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00:10:12,900 --> 00:10:17,310

And there were a lot of people that had loved ones that passed away.

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00:10:17,310 --> 00:10:26,940

And now they want to get their their remains or the body back to Mexico or to Guatemala or wherever they're from.

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00:10:26,940 --> 00:10:40,330

So we put together a presentation in our YouTube channel on how to go about setting things up to be able to do that.

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00:10:40,330 --> 00:10:44,260

(Interviewer)

With the challenges presented by covid-19 regarding service delivery,

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00:10:44,260 --> 00:10:53,910

how do you feel your organization has responded in terms of supporting its immigrant and refugee communities?

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00:10:53,910 --> 00:10:58,710

(Jaime Garcia)

Our response was that we have to be here for the people in need.

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00:10:58,710 --> 00:11:08,400

So we did not close and say we'll be back when we think they are opening up again.

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00:11:08,400 --> 00:11:21,480

We stayed open and naturally, we we make some adjustment because we need to keep our employees safe as well as any clients coming in safe.

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00:11:21,480 --> 00:11:33,630



So we instead of having our doors unlocked, we had to lock our doors and people would have to call to make appointments to come in.

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00:11:33,630 --> 00:11:39,460

And when they called, if we could if we could help them over the phone, we did.

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00:11:39,460 --> 00:11:47,460

So if we if they absolutely needed to come in, then we made appointments for them to come in.

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00:11:47,460 --> 00:11:57,460

And when they did come in, of course, we you know, after after the pertinent questions as far as how how are you feeling?

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00:11:57,460 --> 00:12:02,340

Do you have a fever? We took their temperature and so forth.

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00:12:02,340 --> 00:12:09,000

Then they wore a mask. And so, you know, we we tried to keep everybody safe.

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00:12:09,000 --> 00:12:19,350

And and so we we continued on with providing our services on a limited basis.

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00:12:19,350 --> 00:12:27,330

But we continued on. And and here again, also we adapted, you know, as far as, you know,

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00:12:27,330 --> 00:12:34,950

the type of presentations instead of people coming in for our workshops and seminars we were able to do to

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00:12:34,950 --> 00:12:44,940

set things up by Facebook live or making videotaping presentations and putting them on our YouTube channel.

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00:12:44,940 --> 00:12:51,620

We also were very fortunate to receive funding from various sources,

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00:12:51,620 --> 00:13:01,020

our government and private funding to be able to help people financially affected by COVID,

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00:13:01,020 --> 00:13:14,610

especially those people that are not eligible for for unemployment compensation or for state benefits and so forth.

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00:13:14,610 --> 00:13:27,990

Those people we were able to help them providing help to pay their rent, help, providing help to give them some additional food,

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00:13:27,990 --> 00:13:38,250

pay for their utility bills, know in that form we actually were fortunate to we were able to help.

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00:13:38,250 --> 00:13:49,170

And we see about two hundred thousand dollars was given away to help people and affected by COVID.

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00:13:49,170 --> 00:13:58,680

And so these are the ways that we were able to to respond to this pandemic.

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00:13:58,680 --> 00:14:03,630

We had a a vaccination clinic. We sponsored one.

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00:14:03,630 --> 00:14:14,480

And this this one was specifically for our clients because it was our clients that were.

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00:14:14,480 --> 00:14:25,700

Didn't have the don't have computer skills to get on the computer to register or sign up for for getting a vaccination,

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00:14:25,700 --> 00:14:32,840

or they wouldn't even know where to go or who, do you know who to approach to be able to get vaccinated.

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00:14:32,840 --> 00:14:37,460

So we set it up where we called our clients.

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00:14:37,460 --> 00:14:42,800

We called them specifically to for them to to come in.

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00:14:42,800 --> 00:14:54,950

Many of them, fortunately, were already vaccinated. But we we had we had our clinic and we had around two hundred people that were vaccinated.

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00:14:54,950 --> 00:15:02,960

And this was during the time when vaccines were very hard to come by.

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00:15:02,960 --> 00:15:09,090

(Interviewer)

Please share an overview of the immigrant and refugee communities you serve.

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00:15:09,090 --> 00:15:14,090

(Jaime Garcia)

Our clients here, at Centro de Information, are Spanish speakers,

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00:15:14,090 --> 00:15:23,810

and 90 percent are Spanish speakers where they come and the majority of them come from Mexico,

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00:15:23,810 --> 00:15:32,000

but they also come from other countries, Guatemala, Colombia, Venezuela and so forth.

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00:15:32,000 --> 00:15:41,570

And so but aside from that, we we also our doors are open to anyone and everyone,

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00:15:41,570 --> 00:15:53,600

especially when we are also now we receive funding from the state of Illinois to being an immigrant welcoming center or and so because of that,

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00:15:53,600 --> 00:15:56,960

we are open and not just because of that,

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00:15:56,960 --> 00:16:08,180

especially because of that, we are open to anybody speaking any language coming from any country and but for many years and the well,

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00:16:08,180 --> 00:16:17,120

as long as we've had our immigration services, we have always had people from all over the world coming to us for immigration services.

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00:16:17,120 --> 00:16:30,890

We we've had people from from other European countries, from African countries, from China, from Russia, and the Middle East and India.

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00:16:30,890 --> 00:16:37,400

So we've had people from all over the world coming to Centro de Informacion for our immigration services.

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00:16:37,400 --> 00:16:46,762

And so but yeah, the bulk of there are people coming are people there are Spanish speaking immigrants.