

HISPANIC IMPACT

HIGHLIGHTING LATINOS IN OHIO

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José Morales Crispin: Investing Into Latino Youth

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The family unit and a sense of community is the foundation that strengthens Latino communities across Ohio and the nation. In order to build a sense of belonging and to learn how to function in the United States, Latinos rely on the investment that educators and leaders make in their lives. Jose Morales Crispin is one of those individuals who are building community. As an educator, a mentor and now a Latino Outreach Liaison in the Sheriff's Office, Jose shares with us what it takes to build meaningful lives for Latinos in Central Ohio.



“The community needs to know that they have someone they can trust, and someone who is going to watch their back.”

Until recently, you were teaching in the Whitehall School System, what led you to be an educator?

I always wanted to make an impact on youth by not only exposing those to different cultures and languages, but also to the real world, that was one reason that led me to this role as a teacher. I wanted to be there for the students by providing them knowledge and to expand their horizons; show them that there is a bigger world than the four walls where they learn every day.

What can you share about your heritage?

I was born and raised in Guaynabo, Puerto Rico. Both of my parents are Puerto Rican. I have two older sisters and a younger brother, and five nephews, so it is a big family.

Did you have any key mentors or people who deeply influenced who you are? What can you tell us about them?

My best mentor has been my mother; she has always taught me to fight for what I wanted, and she encouraged me to do the right thing and to help others. My teachers and professors from high school and college gave me another perspective on how I can help our community outside the classroom. Their influence led me to meet community leaders from different sectors such as health, communications, and from nonprofit after school programs. Each one of them helped me gain insight and understand different aspects of what needs to be done to empower our communities.

Is there any advice you would give to a person who is starting out as an educator?

Honestly, to care for your students. If you are willing to invest the time to get to know your students that is going to create a bond that will influence them for the rest of their lives. I had a teacher in eighth grade, Miss. Pérez; to this day, I still have communications with her. She was my mentor when I was doing my student-teacher experience, and was one of the main reasons why I wanted to become an educator. She is one of the people I always go back to for advice. If you create that deep relationship with your students, something more than “Hey, How are you?”, if you ask them about how their weekends were or how their families are, also what their interests are, that is going to create a strong bond between you and your students. Sometimes as teachers, we do not realize how much influence we have in our

students’ lives. We spend so much time in the classroom with them. We are role models whether we realize it or not, so we need to show them the right way.

Why is it important for you to be a Latino male role model for Hispanic youth?

Currently, we live in a society where many of our boys do not really get a chance to experience a positive role model, and they end up falling through the cracks. We see them going through the jail system, or ending up on the streets, or joining gangs. I need to be the role model that they need, someone they can look up to and tell them that they can do it too if they work hard for it. If they can see someone that looks like them, and speaks like them, then reaching their goals will be more attainable.



Rising Youth Conference 17



Rising Youth Conference 17



Latinx Role Model Day at OSU

How important are families and the programs you conduct to empower our children?

Families are essential. In order to influence our kids, we need to grow services that help the entire family. For example, Latinos often have preconceived ideas and biases towards law enforcement. These ideas come from experiences in the past or how media displays law enforcement in the country. Helping families understand their rights and responsibilities builds trust so they do not fear law enforcement but understand how they help to keep the community safe. I believe that if we work collectively with schools, law enforcement, community organizations and with families, we can make a bigger impact on more people. That is why it is so important to work with the entire family.

What is your current position? Can you describe your work?

I am currently the Hispanic Community Outreach Engagement Coordinator for the Franklin County Sheriff's Office. Primarily, my responsibilities are to bridge the gap between law enforcement and the Hispanic community. I get to educate deputies on how to interact with the Hispanic community, whether through seminars, or classes. On the other hand, I get to promote services the Sheriff's Office offers to the Hispanic community. A key component of my role is that I get to reach out to the community, understand what their needs are and find a way to work collectively to solve those issues. Whether through public partnerships with other agencies and programs, or by creating new programs, we work hard to improve Latinos safety and quality of life.

Can you tell me about a project or accomplishment that you consider significant in your career?

One of our most successful initiatives have been Latino Night and it overlaps between my experience working as

an educator and with the role at the Sheriff's Department. Latino Night is a Hispanic community resource fair that takes place in Whitehall, OH. At this event, we bring resources and/or agencies that both want to work with the Hispanic community or already works in the community and we bring them together with schools to host the event. We have services and resources ranging from health, law enforcement, after-school programs, food pantries, and legal services. The event is a way for parents to receive information regarding the different services within our community while kids are able to participate in fun activities. During this time, parents can relax, allow the kids to play while they receive the services and actually ask the questions they need. This will be the third year for the event; the first year we had over 30 organizations and over 200 people. Last year, we had almost 50 organizations and around 450 people attended. The event takes place during Hispanic Heritage Month and this year it is on October 11.

“We want these kids to feel empowered and accomplished so that they can take on the world.”



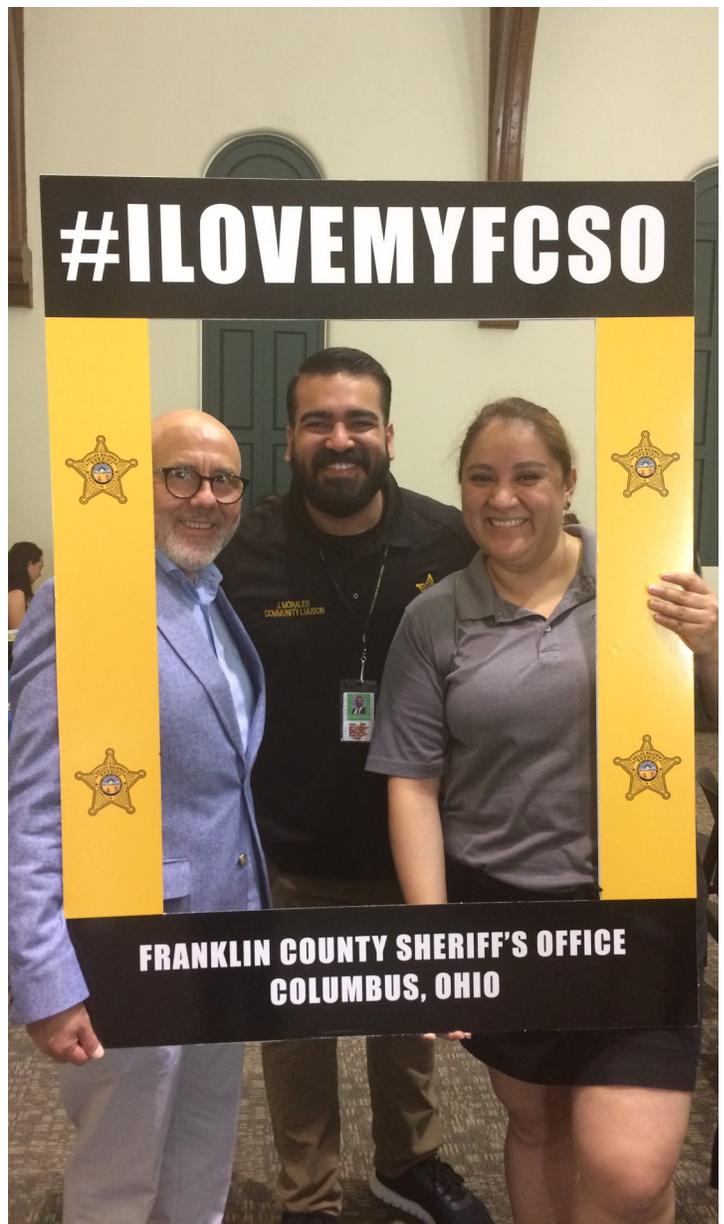
Festival Latino

Another project that is important to me is the Sheriff Offices' R.A.D. Class, which stands for Rape and Aggressions Defense class. In February 2019, we will be offering the class in Spanish for the first time. This course is very important because we encounter so much domestic violence victims who are afraid of coming forward to authorities or say that they are domestic violence victims due to their immigration status in the country. What they may not know is that regardless of immigration status, they are granted protection. We need victims to come forward and report the violence because if they do not, they will remain in this vicious cycle until it is too late. The training is 12 hours long and divided into three classes. The class teaches participants how to identify if you are a victim; sometimes we think that domestic violence is just a partner who is physically violent, when in reality there is so much more. Culturally, we think sometimes it is okay for a partner to take your check away from you or to limit your freedom to leave with your friends and we do not view that as domestic violence when in fact it is. The second part of the class goes over techniques for defense. The third class is a "hands on" class, where we bring in an actor to act as the aggressor. There is no limit of age for this class, so many of the classes have mothers and daughters, neighbors, nieces, aunts, and grandmothers all in one class together.

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What do you see on the horizon for your line of work?

The most important thing I see is to try to have Hispanic and Latino families feel comfortable reaching out to law enforcement. We need our families to feel protected, as I said before, it is important for us, as law enforcement, to let the community know that we are there for them. I always tell whoever I can in the community that before I started working for the Sheriff's Office, I was an educator there lies my passion—and I will continue to educate where, and when I can to lift my Latino community and for my kids. If I thought our Sheriff's Department was doing something wrong in the community, I would not have taken this position. The community needs to know that they have someone they can trust, and someone who is going to watch their back in the sheriff's office.



With The Mexican Consulate

How do you manage a busy work schedule and pursue your personal growth? What is the next big project on your list?

It takes a lot of flexibility and patience; also, a great support system. My wife has been with me all the way, and she has supported my decision to change careers; she has always been there and has my back. I know that it may sound selfish in a way, but I could never complete this journey without her. She is the one who always pushes me and encourages me. It is very important to me to keep some form of balance, and she keeps me grounded.

The next big project I will be working on is in collaboration with Ohio Dominican Sisters of Peace, Catholic Services, and Rising Youth. We are working on holding a youth conference for boys next summer on June 6 and 7th at Ohio Dominican University. The idea is to let the boys come for two days of workshops. The first day will focus on skills and values for boys ages 14 – 18, and they can transfer some of this new knowledge to the younger crowd, boys ages 8 - 13 who will be attending the second day. They will be learning fencing, photography, art, and basic skills like how to be vulnerable, and how to seek help. We want to be able to provide as many resources as we can to the boys. We have noticed that in our community we have many programs for our Latino girls but nothing for our boys. I am very excited about the impact of this project on our young men.



Photo 3

My final reflection is that we must be willing to expand our horizons. For example, I never thought I would be working in law enforcement. In my head, the only way I could possibly help was in a classroom, but I realized that there are a lot of different opportunities and resources that come along with my new job as Community Outreach Engagement Coordinator with the Sheriff's Office and that influenced my decision to move from being a teacher to this job. It was not easy leaving the classroom behind, but I explained to my students that the reason I am doing this is because I want to build a safer community for them when they graduate. I made a commitment to be at their graduation regardless of whether I am still teaching in the classroom or not. In fact, I was at their graduation this past summer, just like any other proud parent. I recently received an email from one of my students where she thanked me for being there, and one of the most important things that she wrote was "Thank you for believing in me when I didn't believe I could do it." That for me was like a big pat on the back. If you get to impact one student, I know that student will influence another and another creating a chain reaction. We want these kids to feel empowered and accomplished so that they can take on the world.

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