

## ➤ Program fosters community leadership skills

LATINAS DE LYNDALE // FROM A1

aims to address some of these challenges. The program, called Latinas de Lyndale en Liderazgo, provides leadership and community organizing training for the neighborhood's Latina population.

The idea is to help the women become leaders in their Spanish-speaking community, with an eye toward eventually becoming leaders in the broader Lyndale neighborhood.

The program, which is funded by a \$20,000 grant from St. Paul-based Nexus Community Partners, is spearheaded by Lyndale Community Organizer Sarah Scott and Latinas de Lyndale program assistant Taylor Shevey, both of whom speak Spanish fluently.

"A lot of the design of this program came out of conversations with the women last summer, and what a lot of them were really hungry for was to learn the skills that can help them have a positive impact on the community. [Latinas de Lyndale] first helps them as individuals, then as a team, and our long-term hope is that these women will help us shape the neighborhood," Hinds said.

Shevey's Spanish is impeccable and she clearly has a great



PHOTO BY BRE MCGEE

Franklin Briceño speaks at a Latinas de Lyndale meeting about taxes and finances on Feb. 11.

rapport with the women, greeting them with effusive hugs and parting with kisses on the cheek.

Latinas de Lyndale "is really about making women feel useful," Shevey said.

"There is such a large [Hispanic] population here, and there has been a general need for this program. It's about taking the skills they already have and converting them into skills that can benefit the whole community."

Since last November, the Latinas taking part in the program have met every other Friday evening at Zion Lutheran Church off 33<sup>rd</sup> Street & Pillsbury. Occasionally, an expert from the Latino community is brought in to speak with the women. Topics covered thus far include managing household

finances, dealing with government bureaucracy, taking effective notes and community organizing, among others.

Following those presentations, the women break into small groups. They work on their public speaking skills and discuss ideas for their upcoming community projects, where they will apply some of the skills they've developed the program to a project meant to improve the Lyndale neighborhood in some way.

Maria Montes is a stay-at-home mom with three young girls and a husband who works full-time. She moved with her family from Mexico City to the U.S. about a decade ago and in recent years has become an active volunteer, helping to organize Lyndale's annual La Posada event.

speaking exercises that take place at Latinas de Lyndale.

"First, more than anything, I would like to help all the women I know who are being abused, and educate them about all the resources that are available to them, and where they can go," she said, adding that her dream is to become a professional community organizer herself.

Other women were motivated to join the program to tackle neighborhood problems.

Narcisa has two adult sons. She says she joined the program after hearing about it through friends.

One of her main concerns is the condition of Lyndale streets, many of which are pocked by axle-busting potholes.

"It would be nice if we could do something to fix them," Narcisa said.

The women are just beginning to plan their community projects, which will begin in earnest this spring and mark the end of the first run of Latinas de Lyndale.

Hinds said he has already been in dialogue with Nexus about expanding the program next fall to incorporate Lyndale's significant Somali community.

"It's all about being invested in your neighborhood. Yes, it's about being a Latino leader, but it's also about being a Lyndale leader — los dos," Scott said.

Reach Aaron Rupar at arupar@mnpubs.com.

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