
Reaching the Summit with Cumbre Humboldt

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Cumbre Humboldt is a non-profit organization that strives to support the Latinx community in Humboldt County. By providing educationally enriching opportunities such as tutoring, scholarships, and field trips, they help level the playing field for Latinx students and their families alike.

Lucy Salazar, president of Cumbre, founded the organization in 2019 while volunteering at Pacific Union Elementary School. Being bilingual, Salazar knew she would be a valuable asset to the classroom setting for Latinx families. Quickly thereafter she recognized a lack of confidence from the Latinx students in the classroom.

“I just started seeing this pattern again of the kids are smart, they're very intelligent but they're not putting their hands up, they're not answering questions, they're not asking questions,” Salazar said. “I just recognize that I personally could not let them fall through the cracks.”

Before becoming the president and founder of Cumbre Humboldt, Salazar was a part of the US Forest Service. It wasn't until her volunteer work during her retirement when she found a new passion. With Salazar's self driven motivation and the advice of Anthony Mancuso's book *How to Form a Nonprofit Corporation in California*, she was able to create the Federal 501(c)(3) non-profit organization we know as Cumbre Humboldt.

The support shown to Latinx students goes beyond just offering educational enrichment opportunities. Creating equity in academic spaces helps them see their own potential as well.

One of the first recipients of the Cumbre Scholarship was Johanna Herrera Cortes, a Fortuna High School graduate. She is currently pursuing her education at University of California Berkeley.

“The people within the organization were very helpful even after I received the scholarship,” Herrera Cortes said. “Cumbre saw that I had potential. They saw that I was more than capable to be here, so if they can see it then I’m going to see it within myself.”

Herrera Cortes also mentioned how Cumbre worked to help her younger siblings and offered them tutoring and additional educational resources to help them keep up with classes.

Breaking down language barriers and stereotypes is another way Cumbre Humboldt leaves their mark on the community. Samuel Penate, Humboldt State University sociology student and Cumbre intern, has been working on outreach to different schools all around Humboldt County. His presentations primarily focus on resources ESL students and their parents can utilize for a more meaningful education experience.

“We are trying to persuade people to use techniques on how to approach parents, and how parents can change the way that ESL students can get resources,” Penate said. “I am creating a way for schools to connect with parents.”

Penate’s work with Cumbre has helped Latinx students overcome the stigmas of going to school while learning a second language. Through his own experience of learning English after coming to the United States from El Salvador seven years ago, he hopes to uplift ESL students in academic spaces.

“I want to empower a lot of people to break the stereotypes,” Penate said. “No one is less than anybody because we are all the same, we all can do this.”

Cumbre’s empowerment of the Latinx community’s youth in Humboldt County also takes on the form of cultural representation. Cumbre Humboldt has paired with Carana Sedano, HSU child development and criminology student, to create Ballet Folklórico Infantil de Arcata. Sedano is the instructor of the dance group and has been dancing herself since elementary school.

“They seem to really like it. Parents really want their kids to keep doing it because it’s part of their culture,” Sedano said.

Having cultural representation is important, especially for Latinx children in a White dominant community. It creates a sense of belonging and cultural pride that every Latinx child should have instilled in them. Sedano shares that while practicing at a park, youth have even recognized their traditional dances.

“In that park there was one instance, specifically, where there was a girl who knew what we were doing,” Sedano said. “She saw and she was like ‘oh mom look el zapateado,’ ” referring to the traditional dance.

.You can learn more about Cumbre Humboldt on their website www.cumbrehumboldt.org, for resources and opportunities for Latinx children and adults of all ages. You can also reach them by email at cumbrehumboldt707@gmail.com.

Editor's note: El Leñador staff member, Steffi Puerto, won a scholarship from CUMBRE in the Fall of 2021.

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