

Community Narratives: A Case Study of the Esperanza Community Housing Corporation

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I. Introduction of Esperanza

Esperanza Community Housing was founded in 1989 in response of encroaching development in South Central Los Angeles that cared very little for the community and didn't profit the residents in any way. Esperanza was founded by four women who noticed the negative effects of development in South Central Los Angeles and saw the growing importance of ensuring affordable housing; the leading founder was one of the first people to recognize housing as a health issue. However, Esperanza recognizes the importance and value of other areas of human life that are of equal importance to housing.

II. Esperanza's Strategies

Esperanza aims to create and nurture a healthy community in the Figueroa Corridor with a focus in five core areas: affordable housing, health, arts, education, and economic development. The organization believes that all five of these areas are equal and that a person shouldn't have to prioritize any individual need above another, so they have an equal focus on each section. Esperanza makes it a part of their vision to empower the community they work in; to give them the space and tools they need to find their own voice.

II. Programing

The Promotores de Salud (Community Health Promoters) training that Esperanza has is just one of the programs that they offer to address issues of health disparities in the Figueroa Corridor. The six month program trains the residents of South Central Los Angeles to become community health leaders while also giving them skills and experience that they can use to seek other employment. Several of the graduates of Promotores de Salud program have gone on to work within the organization to create programming that meets the needs of the community that are left unfulfilled. To this day the Promotores de Salud program has produced over five hundred graduates.

Figure 1 — Portrait of Maria Eva Guardado from the "Mujeres del Mercad" exhibit



Figure 3 — Photograph of the "Mujeres del Mercado: Stories and Portraits" in its exhibition space at the Mercado la Paloma (bottom right)

III. My Internship

I had the privilege of working with Yadira Arevalo the Project Coordinator of the Arts and Culture Program at Esperanza Community Housing Corporation. I have done a series of editing, translating, writing, and researching over the summer for three major projects that focused on sharing the narrative of community members, residents of Los Angeles County, and of a dear partner to Esperanza. The first project was editing and translating the biographies of eleven women who work at the Mercado la Paloma for an installation called "Mujeres del Mercado: Stories and Portraits". The second project was research into the demographics of the people who have died of the novel corona virus (COVID-19) in Los Angeles County. I also had to collect and create twenty-five biographical profiles of people in Los Angeles County who unfortunately died of COVID-19. The final project I worked on is the collection of information on the life of Beatriz Solis, a partner and loyal friend of Esperanza, who passed away this year for a tribute to celebrate her life and the work she did.

Figure 2 — Photograph of the Mercado la Paloma mural outside of the Mercado

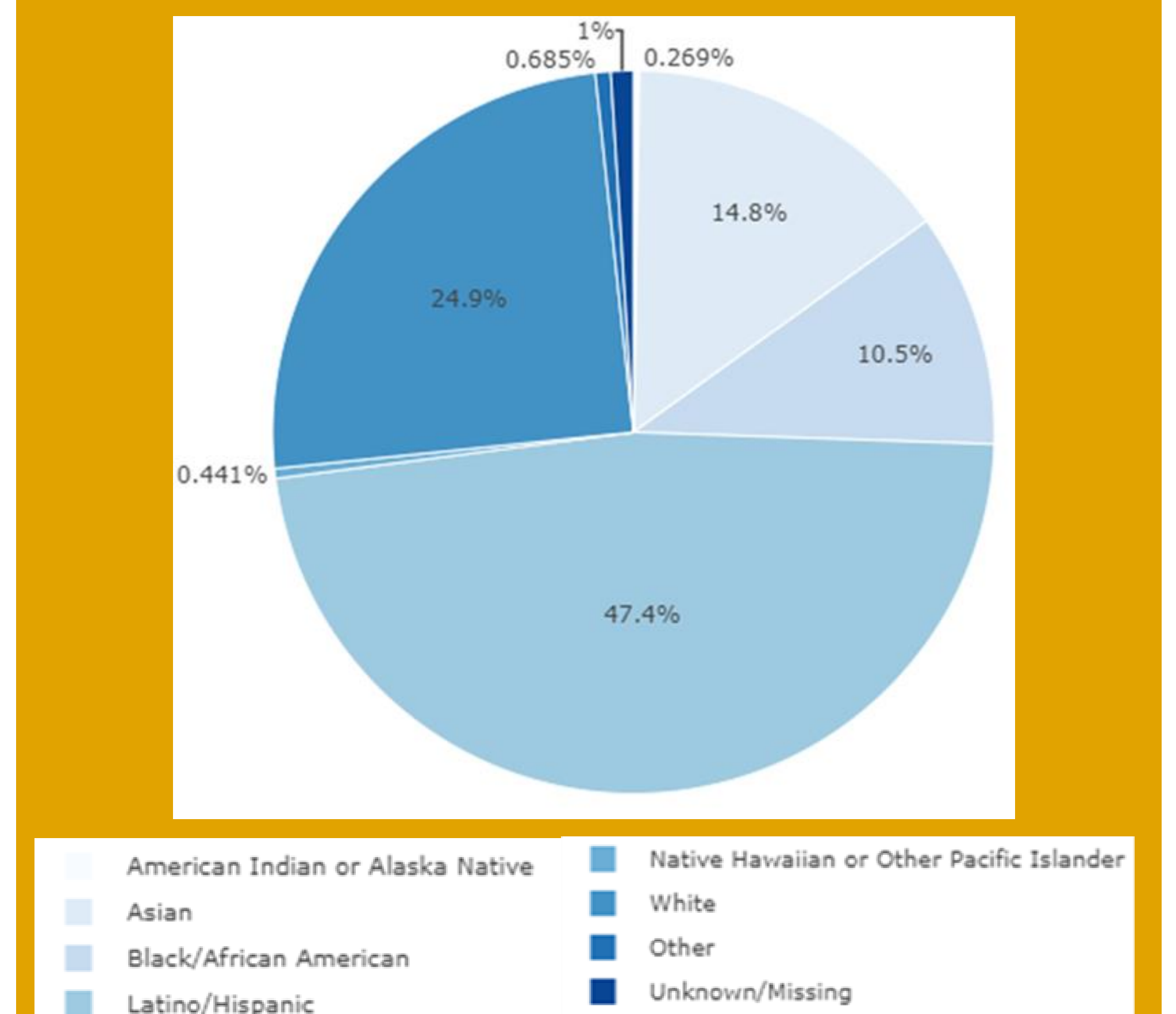


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Figure 4 — Racial demographic of individuals who have died of COVID-19 in Los Angeles according to the Los Angeles County Public Health Department as of July 24, 2020



IV. Conclusions

The work I completed for Esperanza Community Housing Corporation is for the Arts and Culture Program for the current and future installations for exhibition at the Mercado la Paloma. One of the five focuses that Esperanza takes for community development and empowerment is art. The importance of having these installations and events has been highlighted during this pandemic where social distancing and self-isolating are key to reducing exposure to COVID-19. Having these art installation and cultural events fortify community development by fostering community relations and creating an accessible form of art that allows people from different backgrounds to learn without expectations. During a time where community are spread thin by social distancing the "Mujeres del Mercado" exhibit provides a recognition of eleven women who are the staple of the Mercado la Paloma community, sharing their narratives and the beautiful artwork by Angelica Romero and Sandy Navarro.

