



Close the Deal as a First-Time Homebuyer!

At the end of 2023, community member Natalie officially became a homeowner with the assistance of Northwest Center.

"I had been thinking about purchasing a home for a while now, at least a year," Natalie said. "When I was actually getting serious about it, I started looking for resources and information on the homebuying process. The First-Time Homebuyer informational sessions and counseling offered through Northwest Center were very helpful and informative. The two sessions took place over two Saturdays virtually, which was super flexible with my schedule, and included presentations and a Q&A from various people involved in the process, like a realtor, lender, and home inspector, and details on the step-by-step process of purchasing a home. I also had a few counseling sessions with Pre-Purchase Counselor Edwin Pinto, a homebuying counselor with Northwest Center."

The First-Time Homebuying virtual classes aim to guide you through the homebuying process from start to finish. The classes are designed to teach participants about building their credit, loan options, inspection, insurance, and obtaining the certification needed for down payment assistance.

"The counseling sessions were super helpful, as we could get into what I was looking for, my finances, and what price range I could afford," Natalie said. "We reviewed my budget and saw where I could make changes and the monthly costs when purchasing a home. If I had any questions, Edwin could answer them by virtual meeting, phone call, or email. After checking out several homes and making a few offers, I found the perfect home for me in my price range, went through the process, and purchased it! The whole homebuying process can be quite daunting and stressful. Still, I am so glad I could attend Northwest Center's First-Time Homebuyer sessions and counseling to take meaningful steps towards purchasing a home."

If you or someone you know is interested in purchasing their first home, [visit our website](#) and join our upcoming First-Time Homebuying sessions.



Employee Spotlight



"It's important to create spaces for teenagers to hang out. They are often forgotten."

Sydney Marie Perez Teen REACH Youth Coordinator

Sydney Marie Perez joined Northwest Center in mid-October of 2023 after seeing an open position on Facebook for Teen REACH Youth Coordinator.

"I didn't know about Northwest Center or Belmont Cragin previously since I live on the Southside, but once I did more research on the organization, I realized it was a cool opportunity," Perez said.

Prior to joining the team, Perez attended the University of Michigan, receiving a degree in Sociology with a focus on Social Work. Her previous non-profit experience consisted of internships through The Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE), a global nonprofit association dedicated to the educational advancement of professionals in alumni relations, communications, development, marketing, and advancement services.

"After my sophomore year of college, I worked with the University of Chicago in the Alumni Relations Development program and Rush Hospital as a philanthropy intern. Most of my work was backend and in development, but after experiencing more face-to-face work during my internship, I realized I really enjoyed interacting with people in the community," Perez said.

Teen REACH (Responsibility, Education, Achievement, Caring & Hope) is a program that provides a safe, positive, consistent space for students in grades 8-12 to grow together as students and leaders. Teens receive academic and emotional support and develop meaningful friendships within the community. As Teen REACH Youth Coordinator, Perez works with the Youth Team to host after-school youth programs.

"It's important to create spaces for teenagers to hang out," Perez said. "They are often forgotten; they're too old to hang out at the playground and yet too young to have a car or a job. They need spaces where they feel safe and heard. They come to us and tell us about their day, things that are going on in their lives, and to receive help with their homework."

After speaking with both youth and their parents, Perez has received feedback that Teen REACH has positively affected the lives of those participating in the program.

"A lot of them have improved their grades, and one kid said they felt a lot of growth in their emotions, how they think about their interactions with others, and how to be a better person," Perez said.

“One parent who encouraged their kid to join because they were quiet and more reserved let me know they became more social and outgoing. Many youth invite their friends to join or meet new kids they don’t go to school with and build off those relationships.”

Over the past few months, Perez has developed a deeper understanding of why these programs are essential to our community.

“It’s been pretty eye-opening to interact with these teenagers and get to know them on a personal level,” Perez said. “It makes me realize how much more funding needs to go into after-school programs and how important it is to vote for legislation and politicians who favor creating more opportunities for our community to grow. I have reflected on how I would have benefited from these programs as a youth and the mentorship I could have received.”

If you or a youth you know is interested in joining the Teen REACH program, [visit our website](#) and events page for more information.

“Push yourself out of your comfort zone,” Perez said. You never know who you might meet or what opportunities you might experience once you join. Come see what it’s about.”

Health Equity Mental Health Awareness Zine

At the end of last year, the Health Equity Team recruited Belmont Cragin youth to collaborate on a mental health zine, short for magazine. Their goal for this zine was not to make a profit but to offer a way to showcase often unheard voices.

Their intent in co-creating this tool for youth and their peers was to help navigate topics on mental health and call attention to the daily struggles youth are experiencing. They surveyed youth engaged in after-school programming with NWC, and the results showed a need to focus on stress management and self-care. Thirteen Youth Council members were recruited for the art and content design of the zine.

Throughout the process, it was essential to our Health Equity Resilience Manager Cindy Santana and Health Equity Resilience Coordinator Elena Perez that the youth understood the topics featured within the zine while implementing strategies in real-time, like listening to music to help with decompression and concentration.



[READ THE ZINE HERE](#)

Thank you for your support!

Northwest Center would like to express our gratitude to everyone who generously donated to our Giving Tuesday campaign. Your support has significantly impacted our ability to carry out our mission and make a difference in the lives of those we serve. Your kindness allows us to continue providing vital services and support to our community.

For those who have not yet had the opportunity to donate, we kindly invite you to join us in making a lasting impact as we begin the new year.

Your continued support is crucial in ensuring we can provide the necessary resources and assistance to those who rely on us. Every contribution, no matter the size, makes a meaningful difference in the lives of those we serve.

Because of you, last year we:

- Trained a record of 14 community navigators in Know Your Rights who are being developed as leaders through monthly check-ins and quarterly training
- Hosted 53 Common Ground participants
- 34 participants completed our Women Forward program
- 7,960 community members participated in events hosted by our Organizing Team

Thank you once again for your incredible support. Together, we can create a brighter future for Belmont Cragin.

Upcoming Events

For more information on events, visit our website at www.northwestcenterchicago.org/events

2023 GOAL:

\$50,000



Conoce tus derechos de los inquilinos

Parent University*

En Español

30 de Enero a las 10 am
28 de Febrero a las 12 pm
20 de Marzo a las 1 pm



Conoce tus derechos en caso de redadas

Parent University*

En Español

12 pm – 1 pm
February 13
February 29



First-Time Homebuyer Workshop

Parent University*

In English

10 am a 1 pm
Session one: February 17
Session two: February 24



Zumba

Parent University*

January 31
9 - 10 am

*Parent University is located at 3030 N. Mobile Ave. Chicago, IL 60639