

Aprender Ayudando Spanish Service Award Testimonial

Seeking healthcare can be a nerve-wracking experience for individuals regardless of life circumstances, but the barriers to care in medically underserved areas (MUAs) change the experience from anxiety-inducing to nearly unattainable due to factors including lack of transportation, low levels of health literacy, inability to take time off of work, and language barriers.

At Valparaiso University, we have developed several programs emphasizing the importance of Spanish-speaking medical providers. One program included a panel of doctors and medical translators that have worked extensively with Spanish-speaking populations providing examples and personal testimony about the importance of Spanish-speaking providers in the United States. In our positions as University Spanish tutors, we created a weekly program in which we teach medical terminology and how to take patient histories in Spanish to undergraduate and graduate students in healthcare-related majors.

Through this program, we have been able to see interest in learning medical Spanish in students in various programs and years of study. In order to support a continued interest in medical Spanish for future healthcare providers we have been involved with the Spanish faculty to create a Medical Spanish certificate with an emphasis on language, as well as cultural awareness, with a healthcare focus.

Through our time as Language Partners, we have come to realize that the importance of language goes beyond understanding the words that someone speaks; that through making an effort to speak the same language as others, it is a sign of respect, of competency, and of goodwill. Our programs and efforts have all been made with the understanding that learning the language of the people we will be serving is an honor and a privilege, and that with the capability and opportunities that we have been given, we should share what we know to bring this opportunity to others.

Mariah Hykin and Olivia Zetty