

Semillas de Triunfo launches second chapter in Connecticut ^[1]

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The program is being offered for girls in grades six through eight in the city of New Haven.

CienciaPR's executive director Greetchen Díaz Muñoz always dreamed of growing Semillas de Triunfo, one of the organization's flagship programs, outside of Puerto Rico. This past Saturday, January 25, 2025, ten years after founding the program, her yearning to create seedbeds of student leaders in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) in other regions was fulfilled with the launch of the second chapter of Semillas de Triunfo in New Haven, Connecticut, known as Seeds of Success-New Haven.

Seeds of Success-New Haven is being conducted in collaboration with Yale University. It is being led there by Carolina Machado, project manager, and Giovanna Guerrero Medina, former executive director of CienciaPR and now a senior advisor to the organization.

During the first event, 39 students from sixth through eighth grade participated and spent the day visiting science labs. Machado shared that participants were able to ask questions to professionals working in these spaces and experiment with scientific instruments such as microscopes.

In addition, the students attended panels where they learned about STEM professionals, their careers, as well as the difficulties they faced and how they overcame them. They also participated in self-discovery and leadership workshops. Beyond exposing the participants to various activities in STEM and giving them access to mentors in those fields, one of the goals of Semillas de Triunfo is to give the students the tools to become leaders in their communities.

What the program will look like

In contrast to the Puerto Rico chapter, which serves hundreds of students each year and conducts many of its activities virtually, for the New Haven chapter most of the activities will be face-to-face. This is because, according to Guerrero Medina, they are working in a more limited geographic area with approximately 30 schools.

Participants will have laboratories and other spaces at Yale University available for activities, Machado said.

Regarding the mentoring component, Machado said, "We have a very important resource which is access to mentors who are scientists who study and/or work at Yale."

The students will have guides who are experts in subjects such as astronomy, physics, medicine, medical sciences, and engineering and will be able to work on team projects and develop collaborative skills.

STEM in Spanish, English and Pashto

Regarding the diversity of the group, Guerrero Medina noted: "In New Haven schools, 30% of students are African-American and almost 40% are Hispanic [...]. Among those Hispanics there

are many backgrounds, but there is a fairly large community of Puerto Ricans”.

In addition to attracting students from these communities, the program seeks to recruit from lower socioeconomic households because, according to Guerrero Medina, they sometimes lack role models who pursued higher learning.

In conversations with local teachers and educators, Machado and Guerrero Medina realized they needed to make the effort to include students from Middle Eastern countries by creating STEM materials in their language.

“There is a large population of immigrants from Afghanistan and the teachers especially were saying that many times these students don't feel included because of language differences,” said Guerrero Medina.

Therefore, in collaboration with Integrated Refugee and Immigrant Services (IRIS), they were able to translate the program's educational materials into Pashto, a language used by Afghans, Pakistanis, and Iranians.

“This was super rewarding. When I took the material to the schools and the teachers saw it in Pashto, Spanish, and English, they said, 'Oh, that's wonderful! Normally we (educators) have to do the translations so that the students who speak Spanish or Pashto can understand what the programs are about,’” Machado said.

Their expectations

When asked what it means to take Semillas de Triunfo outside of Puerto Rico, Díaz Muñoz emphasized: “For me it is a dream fulfilled. I think the greatest significance [...] is that they have validated our model [...]. We have been able to demonstrate that the Semillas de Triunfo educational model works. It is a product that we have developed in Puerto Rico and that is now being exported to the United States.”

Semillas de Triunfo's manager in Puerto Rico, Liz Hernández Matías, agreed with Díaz Muñoz and added that she was excited about the new expansion.

For her part, Machado stated that it is important to create a community so that the students know they have support in their careers.

Guerrero Medina said, “We know that this program transforms lives. We see it in the students' faces, in the confidence they show at the end of the program, in what parents tell us about how they have changed, and also in the letters we get from them when they are in college or starting graduate school. It's a privilege to bring this model to a new community that needs it”.

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