



La Cocina VA

Tiburon Tank - May 2019

At La Cocina VA we are igniting long-term and sustainable transformation providing solutions to unemployment and lack of entrepreneurial opportunities in low-income Hispanic communities. Our mission is to use the power of food as an agent of social and economic change generating workforce and economic development.

La Cocina VA was created in 2013 to offer vocational and technical education to underserved immigrant communities and to transform unemployment into full employment in sustainable ways. We focus on serving the Hispanic community, 90% of our clients are women, who unfortunately come from life stories of domestic violence, human trafficking, chronic unemployment, and poverty. 37% of our female clients are heads of households, 90% of them are unemployed and 10% are under-employed when they come to our programs.

Often occupational training programs are not targeted toward groups who have limited English skills and/or low educational attainment, further preventing immigrants from attaining the skills they need to be able to obtain a sustainable income. Our programs are bilingual and offer 12 weeks of culinary training culminating in employment, certified by NOVA Community College Workforce Development, followed by a 4-week paid internship provided by our employer partners. Our program also provides daily healthy meals to underserved communities, these meals are prepared by the students during culinary training and delivered to families and individuals living in affordable housing units and homeless shelters, for a total of 20,000 meals/year.

Our Results:

- 85% job placement
- 78% retention rate after one year of placement
- Hourly rate \$14.30 to \$21.00
- Previously employed clients obtain an average of 34% wage increase
- More than 50 employer partners hiring our clients
- 100% of graduates said they were able to improve financial habits after training
- 60% of graduates follow now a monthly budget
- 20% of graduates have been able to save money after six months of employment
- 33% of graduates have been able to reduce debt

During the second quarter of 2019 we are launching our new Culinary Learning Online Application to offer our ESL clients the opportunity to be exposed to more hours of English learning. This app, which could be used from a phone or from a computer, will allow our current and former clients to access vocational English content related to the foodservice industry increasing their opportunities to obtain higher proficiency in the language.

We are building the Zero Barriers Training and Entrepreneurship Center, the first of its kind in the region that will triple our capacity to support entrepreneurship development, provide low income Hispanic entrepreneurs with access to a kitchen incubator, microlending opportunities, capacity building training and access to distribution outlets. The new facility is expected to be opened in the winter of 2020.

This new business model provides us with new revenue streams through the creation of a catering service and a community café, expecting 50% of our revenue in the future.