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Social justice movement leaders are recognizing that inner development and the capacity to effectively collaborate are vital to addressing the complex issues that face our communities and our world.¹ Contemporary calls for systemic transformation that center spiritual nourishment; authentic relationships; and collective action are calls to practices that have defined the Loretto Community throughout its 200-year history of working for justice and acting for peace.

The Loretto Justice Fellows are carrying forward the work of the Sisters and Co-members of the Loretto Community, building upon the good work of Community members who have done and are doing transformative work. Fellows offer direct service in key mission areas where Loretto Community members have long served, doing so in a manner that aligns with Loretto's mission and values—reflective, contemplative, community-connected, and co-created non-hierarchically. As the Loretto congregation evolves, the Loretto Community is uplifting a new generation, energized to make a difference and continue Loretto's legacy. This report will share the story of the first year of our visionary program and highlight the transformative impacts experienced by participants and partners.

The Loretto Justice Fellowship program cultivates individuals and networks with enhanced internal and collective capacity to undertake the multi-pronged approach required for systemic change by developing:

- Self-aware, connected leaders
- Supportive, sustaining relationships and networks
- Cross-organizational mutuality, reciprocity and collaboration

Complex Issues in El Paso: Stakeholder + Systemic Challenges

The El Paso region navigates the intersection of many of the complex challenges that face our world – migration, climate change, health crises and care, employment, education – and the systemic inequities that exacerbate the impact of these challenges on marginalized communities.

The Loretto Justice Fellowship program was born from a process of stakeholder engagement - centering community-identified responses to community-identified challenges.

What we heard:

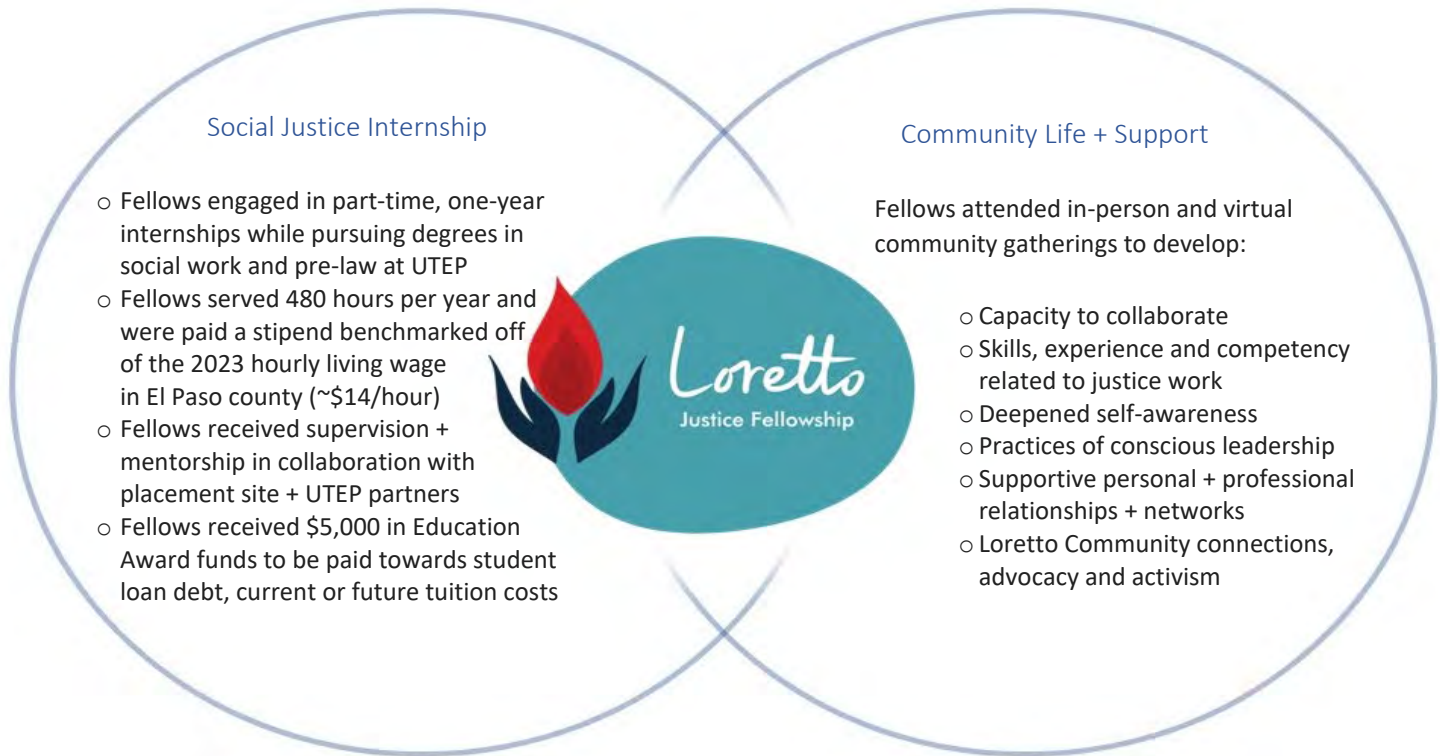
- Due to chronic underresourcing of the nonprofit sector, organizations doing systemic justice work and delivering critical social services in El Paso often rely upon, but are unable to provide compensation to, student interns.
- Students with limited resources are often unable to participate in unpaid internships and, therefore, unable to access experiential education and networking opportunities in justice spaces. Other students are often forced to take on additional debt and risk compromising their employment stability, academic achievement, family responsibilities, and mental or even physical health.

All of this results in barriers to developing leadership from within marginalized communities. And it perpetuates high burn out rates, stunted workforce development and professional shortages in the justice and service sectors. The culmination of these issues is a fracturing of the internal and collective energy necessary for transformative systems change. (See Appendix A for data and citations.)

¹ The [Collective Change Lab](#), the [Emergent Strategy Ideation Institute](#), and the [Inner Development Goals \(IDG\) Initiative](#) call us to increase our internal and collective abilities to face systemic challenges.

Program Design

Our program operates at the intersection of paid, social justice internships and community life + support. Our program design is continually shaped by the needs of Fellows, justice-based organizations (see Appendix B for a list of 2023-24 placement organizations) and University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) partners. (See Appendix C for Pathway Model and Theory of Change.)



Equity, Inclusion, Liberation

In the pursuit of **equity, inclusion and liberation**, the Loretto Justice Fellowship invests in emerging leaders from within the communities they serve, particularly prioritizing investment in women of color who have language, experiential and cultural connection to their clients and the justice efforts of their placement organizations.

- **Assessment data showed 100% of Fellows felt strongly motivated to participate in social justice efforts because of their personal life experiences.** All Fellows are fluent in Spanish and English, identify as Latinas and have close ties to the immigrant community, several as Dreamers, first- or second-generation Americans. Our Fellows are also first-generation college students, mothers, family caregivers and residents of both Ciudad Juarez and El Paso.
- **Assessment data showed that the financial benefits of the Loretto Justice Fellowship increased all of our Fellows' capacity to engage meaningfully with justice work** - capacity that would otherwise have been hindered by financial stress, necessity to work additional jobs/hours beyond their internship and/or systemic barriers to unpaid internships.

"My experience with the Loretto Justice Fellowship has reshaped my perspective on community engagement and justice work. Having not only my peers but the broader Loretto Community walk with me during this experience has been a blessing. The bonds I have created within the community are invaluable, being in spaces where people feel the same drive and desire for change as I do has empowered me and filled me with renewed hope about what the future can look like. Being part of the Loretto Justice Fellowship has reinforced that I belong here, in spaces filled with hope, among people who have the same fire for helping, serving, and change."

Anabel Theriault, Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) Loretto Justice Fellow

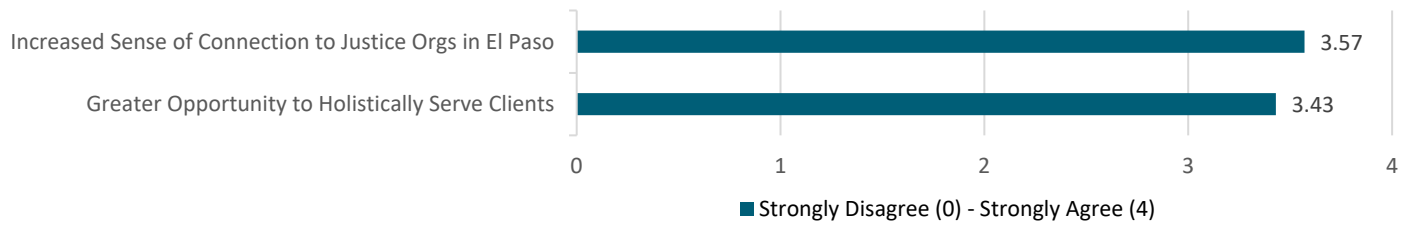
Self-Aware, Connected Leaders

Through program design, culture and content, we centered on key areas of Fellows' development as self-aware, connected leaders. All 7 Loretto Justice Fellows reported that, *because of their Loretto Justice Fellowship experience*, they perceived **extensive growth** in their:

- Capacity to collaborate
- Skills, experience and competency related to justice work
- Self-awareness
- Practices of conscious leadership*

*Leadership that feels sustainable and resilient through self-care, trauma-informed practices and healthy relationships

Fellows **strongly agreed** that our collaborative model and cross-organizational program design promoted:



Assessment surveys asked Fellows about the **most significant areas of change** they perceived in themselves – Fellows most frequently identified growth in the following areas (listed in order of mention frequency, starting with the most frequently mentioned)

- Enhanced sense of connection and feeling part of a community co-carrying the work of justice (with each other, with the El Paso community, with Loretto)
- Increased professional skills, experience and network
- Stronger commitment to persist in social change efforts
- Deeper, more systemic perspectives on complex issues and solutions
- More self-awareness, confidence and sense of personal potential

“The Loretto Justice Fellowship program allowed me to see so many changes in myself, not only professionally but also personally. I’ve been able to create more connections within my community and have learned more about being a leader. The program has made a great impact on my life as it helped me discover how much potential I have.”

Karemy Cruz, BSW Loretto Justice Fellow



Loretto Justice Fellows travel to St. Louis, MO to present at the Loretto Link Annual Meeting – sharing about their work in the border region and reflecting on the Annual Meeting theme of “Spirituality, Community, Justice.” (Jan 2024)

Supportive Relationships and Networks

Relationships are the essential building blocks of systemic change – authentic, reciprocal and collaborative relationships among justice seekers and those we serve. It is the vision of the Fellowship program that the bonds developed within each program year cohort and between cohorts, year over year, will accumulate – cultivating a community in El Paso and beyond of people co-carrying the work of justice.

Between June 2023 and May 2024, **we gathered as a community 20 times**. Our community life program was developed in co-creation with our Fellows - resulting in a community life experience that was named by all Fellows as **the most impactful component of their Fellowship experience**.

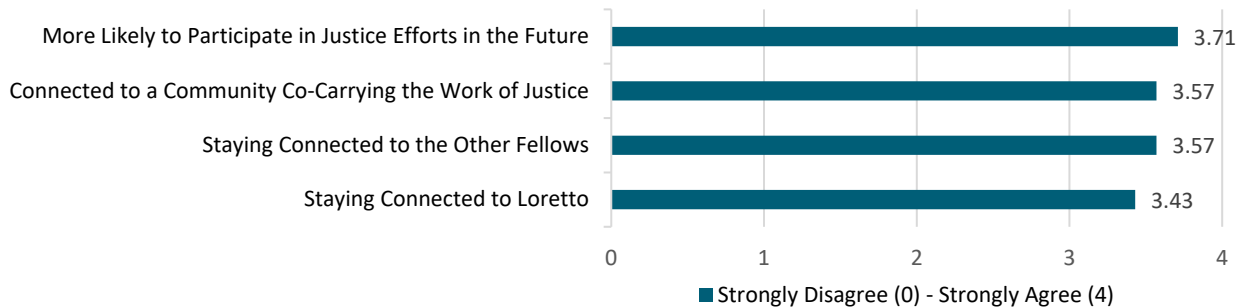
Gatherings included:

- Monthly community meals
- Fall and Spring retreats
- 4-part workshop series on Trauma-Informed Practice + Self-Care in Justice Work
- Professional development sessions offered by Loretto Community members on topics such as:
 - Grant-writing
 - Community organizing
 - Understanding addiction
- Networking sessions with Loretto-connected social workers and lawyers

“My community experience has transformed the way I think about community and social justice. Community is resilience, support, compassion, kindness, and determination to continue fighting for equity. My Fellowship experience has truly changed my perspective, the way I will carry out my profession, and the type of being I want to be for myself, my family, and my community.”

Alicia Villarreal, Master of Social Work (MSW)
Loretto Justice Fellow

At the end of the year, Fellows **strongly agreed** that, *because of their Loretto Justice Fellowship experience, they see themselves as:*



At the end of the 2023-24 Fellowship program year

- 1 Fellow applied for a second Fellowship term
- 2 Fellows became members of Loretto Link
- 4 Fellows became members of the Loretto Justice Fellowship Program Advisory Board



Loretto Justice Fellows with Loretto Community members. (Oct 2023)

Cross-Organizational Mutuality, Reciprocity and Collaboration

There is **unanimous agreement** among all program stakeholders that the Loretto Justice Fellowship experience cultivates a **sense of mutuality and collective benefit** among Fellows, community partners (placement organizations and university partners) and the communities served.

Placement Organizations

In 2023-24 Loretto Justice Fellows contributed **3,351 service hours** to 6 partner organizations in El Paso with **1,440 hours** provided in direct contact with individuals and families.

On end-of-year surveys, placement partner organization respondents **unanimously strongly agreed** that the Loretto Justice Fellowship experience provides added benefits and value to their organizations as compared to general internship experiences.

When asked to name the most significant value added by the Loretto Justice Fellowship program, placement site partners most frequently named (listed in order of mention frequency, starting with the most frequently mentioned):

- Increased connection to interns with professional competencies and personal motivation
- Collaborative program design and delivery
- Increased capacity to advance mission and serve clients
- Enhanced connection to interns with personal, cultural and linguistic connection to the community

“I enjoyed the thoughtfulness and integrity of the discernment process centered on co-creating a highly impactful experience for all involved. It was clear to me that any programming that flowed out of that process would be exemplary and that was confirmed ten-fold. Thank you for investing in our region, in these amazing young people, and our organizations.”

Marisa Limon Garza, Executive Director, Las Americas Immigrant Advocacy Center

Our Fellows have enhanced our partner organizations’ capacity to provide services to their communities by doing some of the following:

- Conducting wellness visits for people held in immigration detention centers
- Providing holistic case management, including connecting clients to community services
- Increasing community awareness of social services available
- Supporting immigration legal processes for clients with limited or no English language skills
- Leading youth programs
- Community organizing

“The support of our Loretto Justice Fellow increases our capacity to serve. The need for immigration legal assistance in our borderland area is ever-present and always exceeds our capacity. The work of the Loretto Justice Fellow helps us to address this incredible need. We are incredibly grateful for the opportunity to participate in this program.”

Anna Hey, Director of Development, Estrella del Paso



Loretto Justice Fellows volunteer with a local partner organization during Spring retreat. (Mar 2024)

University Partners

On end-of-year surveys, UTEP partners **unanimously strongly agreed** that the Loretto Justice Fellowship experience offers unique benefits to student Fellows as compared to the general internship experience of their peers.

The benefits/areas of growth noted by UTEP partners in Fellows as compared with their peers include:

- Increased sense of community support
- Increased skill-development and practical experience
- Increased confidence
- Increased commitment to community service

At the end of the 2023-24 academic year, 4 out of 85 graduating UTEP social work students received awards for outstanding academic achievement, leadership and community service.

3 of these 4 award recipients were Loretto Justice Fellows.



Fellows and their families celebrating UTEP graduation. (May 2024)

“This program has been life-changing for me! It has shown me and taught me valuable things that I will take with me forever, including life-time friendships. I have learned the meaning of co-creation and what it is to be passionate about the work you do. I have so much gratitude to be part of this program and to all the Loretto Sisters and Co-members that have supported us in this journey.”

Jessica Garcia, BSW Loretto Justice Fellow

What makes the Loretto Justice Fellowship Program Special?

Drawing from Loretto's rich history, global network of social justice leaders, mission and values, the Loretto Justice Fellowship program **enhances the capacity and amplifies the contributions of stakeholders** – strengthening the ecosystem of justice-seekers needed to address complex, systemic challenges.

Our stakeholders are on their own journeys in justice individually and in relationship with each other:

- Fellows: Building skills, pursuing education and applying energetic passion towards careers in justice
- Placement organizations: Delivering transformative community services and advocacy for systemic justice
- University partners: Developing and educating future leaders
- Communities: Identifying their own most pressing challenges and most compelling solutions

The Loretto Justice Fellowship program infuses conditions for collective impact: providing backbone support, creating a container for collaboration and operating at the points of intersection of these existing dynamics to relieve burdens, infuse resources, reduce barriers, strengthen relationships, hold space, cultivate collective culture and support success (as identified and requested by stakeholders), while offering practices, relationships and lessons learned over Loretto's 200 years of working for justice and acting for peace.



Loretto Justice Fellows exchange perspectives and experiences with Loretto Community members. (Oct 2023)

Appendix A: Complex Issues: Stakeholder + Systemic Challenges

Justice + Social Service Organizational Need + Capacity:

- Organizations in El Paso doing justice work and delivering social services face limitations in both funding and staff capacity to recruit, retain and holistically support interns
 - Only one of our six 2023-24 placement partners reported having an established practice of making funds available to provide as a stipend to their interns (and that stipend was not guaranteed, it was only provided if it wasn't re-allocated elsewhere by necessity) – while all six engaged intern support to expand the delivery of their missions and services to the community
 - The lack of funded internships among partner organizations does not reflect a lack of value for intern contributions nor lack of desire to provide compensation – most partners expressed desire to financially compensate interns and named funding limitations as the primary barrier to implementing this practice
- Challenges of the Loretto Volunteer Program model:
 - Short-term commitment from transient, temporary participants - this meant steep onboarding investment for short-term engagement; by the time participants were on their feet in service to the organization, they were beginning to think about their next endeavors
 - Participants were all non-local and transplanted to El Paso, most facing language, experiential and cultural barriers to being in partnership with and service to clients/communities
 - Misalignment between skills/interests and placement site organization needs (for example, Theater majors serving in case worker roles)
 - Participation with placement site/clients/work felt episodic rather than sustained
- Hopes for the Loretto Justice Fellowship program model that would better support placement partners and clients:
 - Participants with greater linguistic, cultural and experiential alignment with placement site missions and communities
 - Better alignment between skills, roles and scope of the role, with participants bringing both greater competencies and professional growth motivation to the table
 - Funding and additional supports to attract and retain qualified participants, particularly when placements face staffing and funding shortages
 - Options that create pathways for longer term participation in the work and sustained relationship with the placement site/community

Student Realities + Advocacy:

- In a 2018 study, 83% of social work student participants were employed alongside their practicum and 45% worked over 30 hours per week as a full-time employee.²
- 70% of baccalaureate social work graduates and 73% of master's graduates have educational debt.³
- 74% of law school students graduate in debt, with the average law school graduate owing \$160,000 in student loan debt.⁴
- 84% of UTEP students are Hispanic, approximately half of undergraduates are first in their families to attend college and 55% of UTEP students are not traditional college-aged students
- In our program-visioning UTEP student focus groups:
 - 50% of UTEP social work student participants shared that in addition to being students seeking transformative internship opportunities, they are also working mothers

² Benner, K., & Curl, A.L. (2018). Exhausted, Stressed, and Disengaged: Does Employment Create Burnout for Social Work Students? *Journal of Social Work Education*, 54.

³ Council on Social Work Education. (2021). 2020 statistics on social work education in the United States.

<https://www.cswe.org/Research-Statistics/Research-Briefs-and-Publications/2020-Annual-Statistics-on-Social-Work-Education>

⁴ Hanson, Melanie. "Average Law School Debt" *EducationData.org*, June 15, 2023, <https://educationdata.org/average-law-school-debt>

- All student participants cited the incredible and, at times, impossible challenges of balancing student responsibilities, personal/family responsibilities and financial responsibilities, particularly for those who hold marginalized identities
 - First generation college students noted the difficulties they faced in building and accessing a network of professional contacts/mentors for supporting both academic success and internship experiences; particularly recognizing this challenge in comparison to peers who had college-educated and/or professionally networked families
 - Students with less financial resources particularly spoke to the disadvantages they faced in both accessing and persisting through unpaid internships, given their necessity to also work alongside both school and these internships – many shared they were not able to prioritize their internship’s experiential education opportunities and/or give their full attention and efforts to the internship
- Many UTEP social work students are advocating locally and at the state level as a part of the Pay for Placements Advocacy Movement, joining the National Association of Social Workers Texas Chapter (NASW Texas) in support of one of their 2023 Champion Bills: SB 1796 (Menéndez) & HB 4678 (Bryant), which would deliver stipends to undergraduate and graduate-level social work students as compensation for their field practicum. The legislation would create a pipeline workforce program to mitigate the social work workforce shortage by increasing accessibility to social work degrees and careers.

Professional Shortages:

Social Work

- Texas ranks in the top five states with the most severe social work shortages projected for 2030, with an anticipated deficit of 33,825 professionals; with the El Paso region being a federally designated mental health professional shortage area.⁵

Immigration Law

- Nationally, only about 30% of migrants are now able to find a lawyer to represent them in legal proceedings, compared with 65% in 2019 Texas ranks among the lowest rates of legal representation by state in filed immigration cases - only about 19% of immigration cases filed have legal representation, making Texas’ immigration legal representation rate the 5th lowest in the US.⁶
- The Center for Migration Studies, a think tank, found that there were 1,413 undocumented persons in the United States for every charitable legal professional.⁷
- The immigration court backlog has gone up to more than 3.5 million from 300,000 cases in 2012, with more than a million new cases added in the last year.⁸

⁵ Mares, B. (2023) National Association of Social Workers, Texas Chapter.

https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.naswtx.org/resource/resmgr/resources_2/SB_1796_&_HB_4678_-_White_Pa.pdf

⁶ Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse | Syracuse University (2024). <https://trac.syr.edu/reports/736>

⁷ Kerwin, D., & Millet, E. (2022). Charitable Legal Immigration Programs and the US Undocumented Population: A Study in Access to Justice in an Era of Political Dysfunction. *Journal on Migration and Human Security*, 10(3), 190-214.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/23315024221124924>

⁸ Sandoval, E. (2024). A New Challenge for Asylum Seekers: Lawyer Shortages. *New York Times*.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2024/05/19/us/migrants-lawyer-shortages.html#:~:text=Only%20about%2030%20percent%20of,research%20group%20at%20Syracuse%20University.>

Appendix B: 2023-24 Placement Partner Organizations

[Center Against Sexual and Family Violence \(CASFV\)](#) confronts and prevents domestic violence and sexual assault in all its forms by advocating for safety and justice through intervention, education, and community collaboration.

[Ciudad Nueva](#) seeks the renewal and development of central El Paso's Rio Grande neighborhood through the empowerment and transformation of its residents. Ciudad Nueva works in partnership with residents - advancing an assets-based framework that uplifts the expertise, experience, solutions and skills within the community. Ciudad Nueva focuses on four priority service areas identified by the community: empowering youth, supporting families, strengthening community and equipping leaders.

[Estrella del Paso](#) (formerly Diocesan Migrant and Refugee Services) provides a comprehensive range of immigration legal services for low-income immigrants and refugees including representation in family-based immigration matters, citizenship/naturalization matters, matters related to benefits for survivors of domestic violence and other crimes, removal proceedings before the Immigration Courts, and services for adults and unaccompanied immigrant children detained in the local immigration detention centers and shelters.

[Las Americas Immigrant Advocacy Center](#) provides free and low-cost legal services to immigrants and refugees. Las Americas' vision is that of a country where all immigrants have access to high-quality legal representation based on the principle of justice and human rights.

[Reynolds Home](#) provides temporary emergency shelter for women and children experiencing homeless, while supporting these families' transitions into their own homes. The women residents work with the staff around a three-pronged axis: financial stability, family cohesion and wellness.

[Villa Maria](#) is a transitional home for women experiencing homelessness who are without their families or children. Through a holistic program that addresses physical, mental, emotional and spiritual needs, Villa Maria centers residents on their journey to recovery and self-sufficiency.

What features of the Loretto Justice Fellowship program are most impactful to your organization?

"Giving El Paso students the opportunity to earn a stipend and receive funding for their education enables us as an organization to have had interns who did not have to juggle full time jobs, classes, and internship. In the past we have had stellar interns who could not be fully present because they have had to by necessity work to support their families while earning their degree.

Because the objective of the Fellowship is to fund and equip local students already serving in their community as they pursue higher education, the interns come with a deep knowledge and understanding of the culture of our community. They are already passionate about the El Paso area, and with knowledge of both the gifts and the challenges that our community experiences. Most if not all understand the struggles our community faces as they themselves have experienced similar struggles. And because the students intern in their local community, they are equipped by both Loretto and the local organizations they serve in to serve their communities more effectively upon graduation in their professional roles.

I am so grateful for the posture of Loretto - for the courage it takes to pivot its direction in order to work in a more just and equitable way. This is rare and it is very much needed in philanthropic, faith, and justice-oriented spaces that have been historically led by majority culture people."

Bethany Rivera Molinar, Executive Director Ciudad Nueva

Appendix C: Loretto Justice Fellowship Pathway Model + Theory of Change

