**¿Dónde está mi gente? 3**

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Arena

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**Intro**: From the KBIA Newsroom in Columbia, I’m Sebastián Martínez Valdivia. For the third installment of KBIA Kassidy Arena’s ¿Dónde está mi gente? series, she investigated what resources are available to new Latinos and immigrants in mid-Missouri’s smaller town and found: there’s a need for more. Here’s Kassidy.

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I met with Cristhia Castro on a sunny morning in Jefferson City.

[nat sounds talking]

It echoed in the unassuming brick building and occasionally we could hear the footsteps from the doctor’s office above us. Castro is the executive director of [El Puente](https://elpuentemo.org/index.php/history/)–a Hispanic ministry that works to act as a bridge for Latinos and Spanish-speakers when they move to Missouri, hence the name.

[In Spanish]

*CASTRO1 “It’s also important for the Anglo community to receive the Hispanic community. It’s important that they know the Hispanic community, understand them, and welcome them.”*

She’s from Honduras. She says she likes Jefferson City, but she knows it’s not perfect.

She’s had to help people in something that can seem basic: filling a backpack with school supplies and going to doctor appointments.

[in Spanish]

*CASTRO3 “It varies. That is, medical appointments for some one day, for others another day, helping them translate documents and classes, transportation to attorneys…”*

Castro works with only three other workers to help around three-thousand Hispanic people across [Cole](https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/colecountymissouri/RTN131217) and [Moniteau](https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/moniteaucountymissouri) (mon-i-TAW) Counties have better access to health care, faith experiences, family services and educational opportunities. With that last emphasis, she politely corrected my grammar.

[nat sound of Castro correcting my Spanish]

*[in Spanish]*

*CASTRO2 “There is a need for more organizations like El Puente because for example, our goal is to help the community when they come, to establish themselves* *and so they can continue to better themselves.”*

El Puente has been serving Hispanic communities in central Missouri for nearly 23 years. And other organizations are just starting to follow suit.

Isli Palacios was recently hired as the [Hispanic Resource Coordinator for Catholic Charities of Central and Northern Missouri.](https://cccnmo.diojeffcity.org/hispanic-community-outreach/) And similar to Castro, one of the reasons why Palacios took on this role is because she knows what it’s like to be new. She came to Missouri from El Salvador.

[in Spanish]

*PALACIOS1 “The first day of my classes here, I was walking in the snow and I had just arrived to an unknown world where I didn’t speak the language. It was a huge challenge.”*

Palacios says language is one of the most common barriers new Latinos in Missouri face. But there’s so many others.

I started to see this pattern of *hispanohablantes* or Spanish-speakers, who already went through the new-to-Missouri experience helping others in similar situations. So I called Fernando Carbajal to ask what he thought. About a year ago, he helped start Conxion Hispana–a group of Latino professionals that connect other Latinos with resources around Carthage and Joplin.

Carbajal is from Guadalajara, Mexico and now lives in Joplin. His official job is working as an insurance agent. On top of his day job, he also takes time to help other Spanish speakers learn about things you don't learn in school–like how to open a savings account.

*CARBAJAL1 (:15) “They're fearful that people will make fun of them? Are they afraid to ask questions, because they don't want to sound dumb? You know? So I do it because at one point, I've faced what they're facing right now.”*

[Studies show](https://www.pewresearch.org/science/2022/06/14/a-brief-statistical-portrait-of-u-s-hispanics/) the majority of Latinos in the U-S were actually born here. But the issue is, oftentimes, they can’t go to their immigrant parents for help with those daily situations, that get more complicated when moving around the U-S.

I’m Kassidy Arena, KBIA News, Columbia.