



February 22, 2023

Kristin A. Richards  
Acting Director  
Illinois Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity

Casey Mayer  
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer  
Illinois Department of Natural Resources

Dear Ms. Richards and Ms. Mayer:

El Valor created the below report on our history as organization, and its role and impact in the Pilsen Community over the last 50 years. We hosted a community event on November 30, 2022, to display our findings, and inform the community in the role El Valor has played in the history of Pilsen. Over 35 people from the community attended our event, which was publicized on our social media channels. We have also published the below report on our website<sup>1</sup>.

El Valor worked with the Chicago History Museum, the Lozano Branch Library, the Art Institute of Chicago Archives, and studied our own historical records and news articles highlighting the history, founding, and impact of our property at 1850 W. 21<sup>st</sup> Street. Through our research, we found El Valor's roots run deep within the Pilsen community. Our history is intertwined with local agencies and community events that still stand today. Below is a summary of our findings:

### History of the 1850 W. 21<sup>st</sup> Property

Our research from the Chicago Building Permits Digital Collection<sup>2</sup> found the 1850 W. 21<sup>st</sup> St property was first registered as a dry cleaning company in 1917. In 1933, the lots of 1850 through 1842 W. 21<sup>st</sup> St became one property, per the Sanborn Fire Insurance Map<sup>3</sup>. Bell Electric Company, a subsidiary of Western Electric, which later became AT&T, bought the building in 1946<sup>4</sup>. Bell Electric applied for a construction permit for the 1850 property in 1946<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> <https://elvalor.org/wp-content/uploads/Capital-Project-Paper-Final.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> See attached figure 1 (Chicago Building Permits, Book 10, West: Feb 2, 1916 - Nov 6, 1919; CBPC\_LB\_16 ( Original Reel No. 22) - pg.198/323)

<sup>3</sup> Sanborn Fire Insurance map From Chicago, Cook, ( Vol 8, June 1950 & 1914)

<sup>4</sup> See attached image (Chicago Building Permits, Book 56, Citywide: Mar 15, 946 - Feb 19, 1947; CBPC\_LB\_37, ( Original Reel No. 43) – pg. 129/309)

<sup>5</sup> See footnote 3.

<b>Main Office</b> 1850 W. 21 <sup>st</sup> Street Chicago, IL 60608 P 312.666.4511 F 312.666.6677	<b>El Valor &amp; ComEd Inclusion Center</b> 1924 W. 21 <sup>st</sup> Street Chicago, IL 60608 P 312.997.2030 F 312.997. 2035	<b>Guadalupe A. Reyes Children &amp; Family Center</b> 1951 W 19 <sup>th</sup> Street Chicago, IL 60608 P 312.997.2021 F 312.432.9849	<b>Carlos H. Cantu Children &amp; Family Center</b> 2434 S. Kildare Chicago, IL 60623 P 773.242.2700 F 773.542.1528	<b>Rey B. Gonzalez Children &amp; Family Center</b> 3050 E. 92 <sup>nd</sup> Street Chicago, IL 60617 P 773.721.9311 F 773.721. 5865	<b>Cicero Children &amp; Family Center</b> 5310 W. 24 <sup>th</sup> Place Cicero, IL 60804 P 773.242.2710
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The architectural firm McNally and Quinn worked on the building alongside Paschen Construction.<sup>6</sup>

El Valor began with a \$10,000 loan from Hyde Park Bank. The organization started in the basement of St. Pius Church. After pressure from the state and a growing list of applicants, a search for more permanent quarters started.

In May 1973, El Valor bought the 1850 W. 21<sup>st</sup> St building from Dominic Lombardi, Owner of Casa del Pueblo, a longtime Pilsen business. Mary Gonzales, daughter of Guadalupe Reyes, was on a walk one day when she saw the for sale sign on the 1850 W. 21<sup>st</sup> building. At the time, the building was empty and full of equipment from its previous use as a commercial dry cleaning site. Mary called the number on the sign, scheduled a tour and imagined the possibilities. The building was on sale for \$65,000. After meeting with the owner and a lawyer, Mary walked out \$65,000 in debt and with the building. After a closer look she realized the building was purchased on contract and was still in the original owner’s name, meaning she could not designate the building as owned by a nonprofit. Mary was on the board of the Pilsen Neighbors Community Council. After multiple meetings, the Council agreed to purchase the building and sell it back to El Valor for \$1.



The 1850 W. 21<sup>st</sup> Street building still serves as El Valor’s main office and Community Day Services facility for its adults with disabilities today.

### Guadalupe Reyes, Founder of El Valor

Guadalupe Alcala was born in 1918 in Oklahoma, to Jose and Sabina Alcala, migrant farm workers who emigrated from Mexico. In the spring of 1929, Sabina Nuñez Alcala died in childbirth. Guadalupe took on the role of raising her younger siblings and helping her father with their family. The family worked as migrant workers in Minnesota, North Dakota, and South Dakota. In 1939, her father, Jose, moved his family to Chicago, settling in the Back of the Yards neighborhood in search of better opportunities. In 1939, Guadalupe Alcala married Andres Chavez Reyes. They reconnected at a church event after working in the fields of North Dakota together. They went on to have a large family with 11 children by 1969.

Bobby Reyes was born in 1950. He was their sixth child. Bobby contracted spinal meningitis at eight months old. Doctors gave Guadalupe a prognosis no parent wants to hear. Bobby would never communicate, walk, socialize, and would likely not

*Guadalupe and Bobby Reyes*

<sup>6</sup> McNally and Quinn Records, Ryerson and Burnham Art and Architecture Archives, Art Institute of Chicago.

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live to his 10<sup>th</sup> birthday. At the time, there were no resources for children with disabilities, but Guadalupe did not accept defeat. She used her own unorthodox therapies, like teaching Bobby to blow up balloons, to strengthen his lungs and tape his feet to his tricycle to exercise his legs. By 1958, Guadalupe and Andres settled their family in Pilsen.

### Change in Pilsen

In the 1960s, the population of Pilsen was transitioning from Czech, Slovak, Bohemian, Slovenian, Lithuanian, and Polish workers to primarily Mexican<sup>78</sup>. Discrimination and lack of resources were prevalent in Pilsen with the shift in the immigrant population. Mexican families moved to Pilsen after being uprooted due to urban renewal. They were displaced from the Taylor

Street neighborhood to make room for the construction of a new University of Illinois campus in Chicago. Families were resentful and angry at the displacement and subpar living conditions in the community. In the 1970s, residents saw the need to better their community and demand change for the Spanish speaking population. This sentiment resulted in resistance and revolution filling the air. At the time, around 55% of the Pilsen neighborhood was Spanish-speaking and in need of services.<sup>7</sup> Pilsen became a center for activism in the city of Chicago, and Guadalupe Reyes was at the forefront for the call of better resources, schools, and funding for the Pilsen community.

### El Valor and its founding

Reyes continued to search for resources for her son Bobby. She placed an ad in the newspaper to ask for services in the Pilsen community. By 1956, she had formed a small group of parents who had children with disabilities to meet weekly to discuss funding and options for their children at St. Vitus Church. Out of this group, Esperanza school was founded in 1969. Esperanza continues to operate in the West Town neighborhood, delivering health to Chicago's underserved communities. At the time, Esperanza's program was only available for children with disabilities. When Bobby aged out of this program and Chicago Public Schools, Guadalupe went on to create El Valor after realizing that there were no options for her son to continue building his skills, routines, or care. The organizations mission was to serve adults with disabilities.

<sup>7</sup> Fernández, Lilia. "From the near West Side to 18th Street: Mexican Community Formation and Activism in Mid-Twentieth Century Chicago." *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society (1998-)*, vol. 98, no. 3, 2005, pp. 162–83. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40193976>. Accessed 5 Oct. 2022.

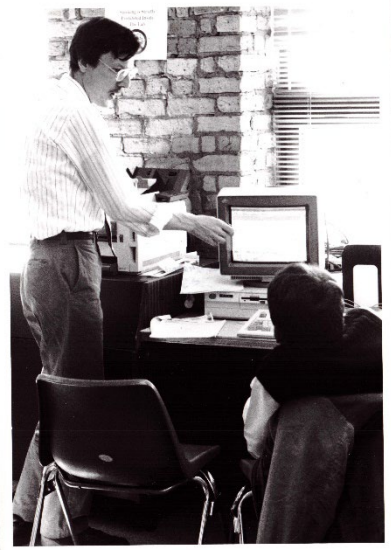
<sup>8</sup> Curran, Winifred. "'Mexicans Love Red' and Other Gentrification Myths: Displacements and Contestations in the Gentrification of Pilsen, Chicago, USA." *Urban Studies*, vol. 55, no. 8, 2018, pp. 1711–28. *JSTOR*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26958524>. Accessed 5 Oct. 2022.

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There was a need in the community for programming for adults with disabilities who aged out of the CPS system. Parents needed dual-language services for their children where they could continue to learn and develop life skills. At first, parents met in the St. Pius church basement to offer workshops for their children. Soon enough, word of these services spread and the waiting list grew. El Valor soon outgrew the space. By 1973, Reyes and her daughter, Mary Gonzales, had bought the 1850 W. 21<sup>st</sup> St building, where El Valor’s Main Office and Community Day Services operates today. El Valor became the first bilingual rehabilitation program for adults with disabilities in the State of Illinois.



After the purchase of the 1850 W. 21<sup>st</sup> St property, El Valor opened workshops for individuals with disabilities to learn light factory work. The agency formed subcontracts with the City and local factories. El Valor’s clients were paid industry rate for repairing street lights, packaging, and smaller sorting and assembly projects. El Valor had contracts with the American Dental Association, Borg Warner, Candle Corp, Master Uniform, Group W Cable and the City of

Chicago. They were paid for their work at a time when individuals with disabilities were fighting to join the workforce and were not fully included in the community.<sup>910</sup>

With help from IBM and the Department of Rehabilitation Service, El Valor created a model for training adults with disabilities as computer programmers. The agency expanded their services with the ABLE (Achieving a Better Life Experience) program in 1988. Participants learned the computer language COBOL, a widely used programming language at the time. By 1989, 22 participants graduated the program and maintained employment as programmers.

On April 19, 1988 El Valor opened their first early intervention center at 1924 W. 21<sup>st</sup> St. El Valor’s first

*Program ABLE participants learning*

<sup>9</sup> West Side Times, Vol. 38-44, Sunday, June 5, 1977, El Valor workshops looks back on 4 years of steady growth by Judy Love

<sup>10</sup> Chicago Sun Times, Wednesday, September 21, 1983, Pilsen’s Center lights the way for handicapped by Norma Sosa

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children’s program was designed to meet the needs of children with disabilities. They provided speech therapy, physical therapy, occupational therapy, and parent/infant education. This building became the El Valor & ComEd Inclusion Center. The location later provided workforce development services to assist individuals with disabilities in finding meaningful, long-term employment. As of 2021, 23% of adults in Illinois have a disability<sup>11</sup> and 19.1% are employed.<sup>12</sup> El Valor’s Workforce Development program bridges this gap to provide individuals seeking employment help with resume building, interview preparation, on-site job training, and more.

On April 22, 1985, El Valor broke ground on its first residential facility for adults with disabilities (1931 W. 19<sup>th</sup> St), later growing to open five additional residences. As El Valor continued to address needs in the

community, their facilities and mission grew. On May 19, 1994, the Guadalupe Reyes Children and Family Center, located at 1951 W. 19<sup>th</sup> St, opened its doors. The Center provided early childhood education and programs for the community. Children

*Guadalupe Reyes Children and Family Center Groundbreaking*



with unique needs received early supports, while families were given additional dual-language resources not available in Illinois.



### El Valor Today

El Valor has grown since its founding in 1973 to serve multiple communities throughout the Chicagoland area. This

includes Little Village, South Chicago, Berwyn, Cicero, and multiple South & West suburbs. Today, the agency boasts four Children and Family Centers, a center for developmental training for adults with disabilities, an Inclusion

*Adult Program Participants in Cooking Class*

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/infographic-disability-impacts-all.html>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/disabl.pdf>

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Center, and six residential facilities. Programs for adults with disabilities at El Valor include a workforce development program that connects adults with long term employment, a day program where adults can develop their social and life skills, residential facilities where adults are cared for 24/7 while living among their peers, and multiple opportunities to engage in community life (Special Olympics, cooking classes, art classes, Zumba and yoga, music sessions, and more). El Valor’s Adult Art Program has had exhibits all over the city and was featured at Barney’s New York.

Early Childhood Education programs include a STEAM based curriculum, allowing children to learn in an inclusive environment and explore their interests. To ensure their wellbeing, El Valor provides two nutritious home cooked meals and two snacks daily. El Valor is involved from the very beginning of a child’s life. This includes a community baby shower for new and expecting mothers, resources for families, early intervention diagnosis, and parent support groups. El Valor takes a holistic approach to support the family as a whole. Their bilingual

*Child in the Carlos H. Cantu Children and Family Center SMART room.*

programming spans multiple communities, with a variety of programs and resources provided in

Spanish and English.

El Valor is accredited by the Commission and Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF). They have received numerous recognition awards including the Vanessa Rich Innovation and Leadership Program Award, Wing Across the Americas, The Francis J. Gerty Award, The August W. Christmann Award, The Helen Cody Baker Award and the Chicago Community’s Trust Management Award.

El Valor’s founder, Mrs. Guadalupe Reyes was involved in various programs and projects that



still stand today. These initiatives include co-founding Fiesta del Sol, the largest Latino festival in the Midwest, pushing for the construction of the Lozano Branch Library, and a new fieldhouse for Harrison Park and Benito Juarez High School. She founded Esperanza School, a nonprofit that continues to serve adults and children with disabilities and Proyecto

Maravilla, an opportunity for seniors to share their skills, values, and cultural traditions. She tirelessly advocated for members of her community and pushed for better resources, opportunities, and programs to help those most in need.

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El Valor continues her legacy through advocacy and addressing the critical needs of the underserved. The agency collaborates with community partners including Tropical Optical, Alivio Medical Center, University of Illinois Chicago, National Lewis University, Little Village Rotary, Economic Strategies Development Corporation, Pilsen Neighbors Community Council, Mujeres Latinas en Accion, the National Museum of Mexican Art, The Resurrection Project, Latino Policy Forum, and Arc of Illinois.

El Valor has grown considerably from beginning in a church basement to serving over 4,000 children, adults with disabilities, and families in 15+ Chicagoland communities. As the needs of the community have grown and adapted, so has El Valor. Our hope for the future is to become the best in the nation in early childhood education and parental engagement and a model for inclusion of people with disabilities in all aspects of the community. Guadalupe Reyes started El Valor for her son and her community. Today her impact is rooted deep within the fabric of Pilsen and we hope to continue her spirit of advocacy and fight. The legacy of Guadalupe Reyes and El Valor is more than just the programs she created and the buildings they occupy. It is in the impact in the communities she and the organization serves.

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Date JUL 10 1946

Water App. 59361 Permit No. 72128 File No. 339330

Owner Bell Electric Co Plan No. 933

Location 1850 W. 21st St.

Arch. J. P. Quinn Contr. Henry Paschka

No. of Stories 2 W. E. Atty for Electrical Installation

Violation \_\_\_\_\_

Report Noted 7.18.46 Quachak

8.13.46 Complete front setting tile part

8.30.46 Clearing

9.18.46 Trim

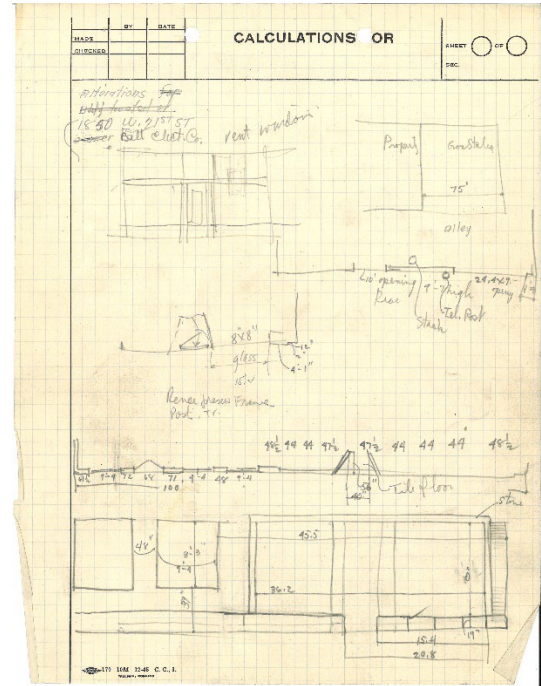
10.11.46 Standstill

Certificate of Occupancy No. \_\_\_\_\_

Cost 7600 P. 9.90W F. 00 Final Report 10.31.46 Quachak Inspector

Full Recommended	Time Extended	Have Complied	Withdraws
FLYING NO.	THE DISTRICT	VOLUME DISTRICT	SPECIAL USE

Form B.D. 1207, 3 Books 11-45 445 1148



Chicago Building Permits, Book 10, West: Feb 2, 1916 - Nov 6, 1919;  
 CBPC\_LB\_16 ( Original Reel No. 22) - pg.198/323

McNally and Quinn Records, Ryerson and Burnham Art and Architecture Archives, Art Institute of Chicago.



1924 W. 21st Street Early Intervention Center Opening



Construction at 19th and Damen for Guadalupe Reyes Children and Family Center

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*First CILA facility at El Valor*



*Groundbreaking for Carlos H. Cantu Children and Family Center*



*Guadalupe Reyes at the Guadalupe Reyes Children and Family Center*



*Adult Program Participants at the Special Olympic Opening Ceremony*

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*Opening of the Rey B. Gonzalez Children and Family Center*



*Monarch Butterfly Release at the Cicero Children and Family Center*

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