



THE EVOLUTION INSTITUTE

2024

IMPACT REPORT

Applying science-based solutions to solve today's most pressing social issues

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Overview

Dear Friends of the Evolution Institute,

Welcome to EI's annual Impact Report as we begin our **15th year** as an educational, science-based think tank that not only researches best practices, but implements them to improve the quality of lives in underserved communities. Our Mission and Vision reflect this, and our Values support our commitment to being part of the solution, as we apply research, knowledge, and expertise to elevate quality of life, advance social justice, and add value to issues affecting humanity for the benefit of all people.

Board members Gin Lieberman and Jerry Lieberman introduce **EI's Overarching Project - Elevating Quality of Life**: how it came to be, how it is measured, how we selected Norway and Mondragon, Spain for developing long-term partnerships, and the major obstacles we see as impeding further progress. These include growing inequality, authoritarianism, privatization, and hostility toward immigrants and people fleeing tyranny and poverty. EI is engaging with organizations throughout the US to share knowledge and greatly strengthen interest and capacity for

worker-owned cooperative businesses. Our Project Highlight is **East Pasco Academy**, which is featured on the covers. Director **Cathy Fisher** and Assistant Director **Londa Edwards** describe growth in enrollment and staffing, outreach from the University of South Florida's Health & Nutrition Program and the Sertoma Speech and Hearing Foundation, updates to the classrooms, favorable results from the Frog Street Curriculum, and programming and assistance to their students, families, and communities.

Additionally, our recently hired Early Learning Program Director, **Ljubica Sevic**, relates our aspiration for EPA's Educational Expansion as a **Model for Replication and Community-Building**. Shortly after her retirement as Provider Relations Director and earlier, Supervisor of Instructional Programs at Pasco-Hernando Early Learning Coalition, she joined us in this mission with Farmworkers Self-Help and Resurrection House Mission, a congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. She details the need for high-quality



Overview Continued

programs and affordable childcare in Pasco and across the state and what EI and its Operations Manager, **Pastor Bruce Edwards**, are doing to promote “community wealth building” around the state.

This year we include two Project Spotlights: **Cambridge Elements Series and Worker-Owned Co-ops and Community Development**. Board Member Dave Bjorklund facilitated EI’s receipt of a 5-year contract with Cambridge University Press to produce publications in the Applied Evolution Series. Three were published in 2024: Board member, Nina Witoszek’s with coauthor, Mads Larsen’s “Evolutionary Perspectives on Enhancing the Quality of Life;” Sybil L. Hart’s “Attachment and Parent-Offspring Conflict;” and David C. Geary’s “The Evolved Mind and Modern Education.”

EI Co-founder and Secretary-Treasurer, Jerry Lieberman is on the forefront of **Worker-Owned Co-ops and Community Development**. He eagerly positions EI as a potential global partner with the Arizmendiarieta Social Economy Think Tank (ASETT), whose author he met just over a year ago, and his document is presented here. Jerry provides another related document that Mondragon Corporation published, **The Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Framework**.

We also include two Partner Spotlights: **Florida Rising** and **The Tommytown Community**. Board member, Alphonso

Mayfield, chairs the Florida Rising Board and introduced EI to Florida Rising Chief Strategy Officer, Sheen Rolle. She met with Operations Director, Bruce Edwards, in October and they saw a “fit” in partnering to provide what each organization does better: EI’s community wealth-building early learning centers, and Florida Rising’s independent political power that centers historically marginalized communities.

EI partners with two organizations in **The Tommytown Community: Farmworker’s Self-Help and Resurrection House Mission** also known as “Rez House.” They provide property, buildings, and renovations for East Pasco Academy at Tommytown and its expansion to serve future primary grades, while EI provides research, curriculum oversight, technical assistance, and payroll and tax services.



Overview Continued

Jerry Lieberman concludes the 2024 Impact Report with **Looking Forward**; he's hopeful of continued collaboration with **Mondragon in worker-owned cooperative development**, commitment to expanding early learning centers in underserved neighborhoods while improving our own in response to parent surveys, and becoming a **"one-stop" community hub**. And finally – movement toward creation of an endowment will sustain EI's mission, vision, and values.

Our excellent rating as a non-profit from highly reputable organizations can be attributed to the numerous ways our board members support EI including: financial support; outstanding credentials; career prominence; and time commitment. Specifically, executive committee members **Rafael Wittek**, **Nina Witoszek**, **Heather Parker**, and **Jerry Lieberman** meet monthly to provide excellent oversight. As administrators, Nina keeps our relationship with Poland alive, and Rafael and Heather have secured interns for our programming.

Dave Bjorklund has linked us to Cambridge University Press and its Elements Program, which provides financial support for EI's work. Dave is also a major donor and successfully encourages colleagues to donate.

Alphonso Mayfield has provided annual major donations through his union as well as connected us to Florida Rising, a non-profit he chairs that is highly regarded throughout Florida.

Virginia Lieberman is a major donor and full-time volunteer focused on communication, public relations, fundraising, and virtually all aspects of administration and planning.

David Sloan Wilson EI's co-founder, earmarks earnings from his book sales to EI, and connects us to scholars who add real value.

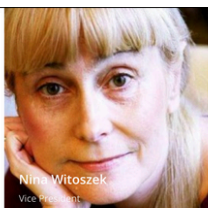
Nagore Ipiña Larranga, Dean of Humanities and Education Sciences of Mondragon University, has been vitally important in coordinating and channeling resources from her college, making key contacts at Mondragon and subsidizing and planning visits to Mondragon.

Judy Stone has provided excellent contacts with distinguished Hungarians enabling us to ascertain the viability of an initiative in the country to restore rule of law. She has also provided assistance to develop a health clinic in Tommytown.

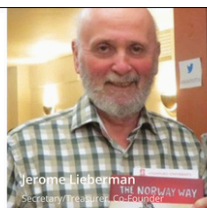
Victor Crist linked EI to a community where he has accomplished major redevelopment and presented these achievements on EI's behalf to public officials and organizations that can redevelop Tommytown.



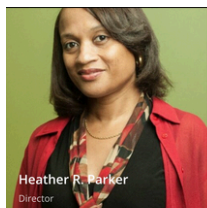
Rafael Wittek
President



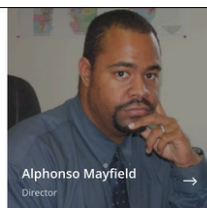
Nina Witoszek
Vice President



Jerome Lieberman
Secretary/Treasurer/Co-Founder



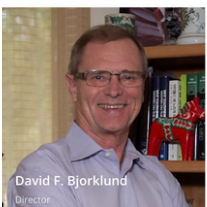
Heather R. Parker
Director



Alphonso Mayfield
Director



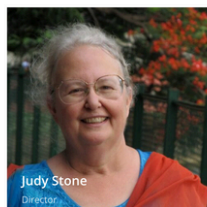
David Sloan Wilson
Director/Co-Founder



David F. Bjorklund
Director



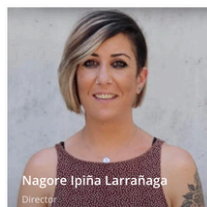
Gin Lieberman
Director



Judy Stone
Director



The Honorable Victor Crist
Director



Nagore Ipiña Larranga
Director

MISSION

Our mission is to apply science-based solutions and use evidence-based best practices to solve today's most pressing social issues and improve quality of life.

We bring science experts and practitioners together, resulting in a new agenda for research, policy formulation, and policy implementation. Many of our projects are focused on serving underserved neighborhoods in Tampa Bay and Pasco County, Florida with the aim to develop innovative yet practical approaches that meet the specific needs and opportunities of communities.

VISION

Our vision is to apply research, knowledge and expertise in order to elevate quality of life, advance social justice and human equality, and add value to issues affecting humanity for the benefit of all people.

VALUES

We are committed to being part of the solution.

- We believe in a just and fair society. Everything we do is oriented toward the welfare of others and society as a whole.
- We believe in the importance of scientific knowledge, research, evidence and facts and the importance in applying these to help others and improve the world.
- We value quality of life for humans, and the environment that sustains them, now and for future generations.
- We value diversity and have respect for all communities and cultures.
- We value democratic practices, secular education, free inquiry, and humanistic philosophy and ethics.
- We value cooperation and collaboration and believe in working together to help others and to improve the world.
- We value inclusivity and believe that first and foremost every human being deserves the same rights and respect.
- We value an understanding of cultural evolution and believe we can learn from our history, to improve our future.
- We value innovation and creativity and believe that we can all contribute to improving the world in which we live.
- We value integrity and professionalism and operate within a framework of accountability, transparency and fiscal responsibility.

OVERARCHING PROJECT

ELEVATING QUALITY OF LIFE

- Jerry Lieberman, PhD, EI Co-founder and Secretary / Treasurer
and Virginia Lieberman, PhD, Communications Director and Board Member

At the conclusion of 2024, the Evolution Institute's **robust board had expanded to 11 people** including international members from Norway, Spain, and the Netherlands, alongside just two original members still serving, EI's co-founders David Sloan Wilson and Jerry Lieberman. Therefore, it is not only necessary for our thousands of followers to know where we started, what we've done, and what has resulted, but also for our board, staff, and the many volunteers who have engaged with us over the years.

After considerable discussion, workshops, and research, the co-founders concluded that **"quality of life"** should be our overarching project. Consequently, we agreed to have a workshop at the University of Memphis in November 2011 to learn as much as possible about quality of life: how it is defined and measured.

In order to ensure our workshop would be substantive, scholarly, and credible, we invited representatives from the UN, an international organization of scholars focused on quality-of-life studies, and others with considerable expertise on the subject to participate. We considered which nations received consistently high ratings on the United Nations Human Development Index, learning that Norway was repeatedly the highest - with the least inequality according to the UN Gini coefficient.



After careful preparation, the Evolution Institute **hosted a 2013 workshop in Oslo** with Norwegian humanists, historians, and members of the University of Oslo faculty, and 11 years later EI maintains many of these relationships for the purpose of mutual learning.

More recently, starting in 2016, we have built a **partnership with Mondragon Corporation** in the Basque region of Spain. Despite differences in their culture and history, residents of both Norway and Mondragon enjoy a very high quality of life. People's basic needs are met with little income disparity in both places. Workers in Mondragon have democratic control of their cooperative workplaces, and early public education and lifelong learning is valued and promoted.

OVERARCHING PROJECT CONTINUED...

This history not only contextualizes what appears in this 2024 Impact Report, but demonstrates how EI's modus operandi has real credence, continuity, and sustainability. Put differently, EI has the ability to **apply cultural evolutionary theory to real-world problems and provide viable long-term solutions.**

We came to realize in 2024 that many Americans still find it challenging to think in terms of how to achieve an international perspective that is not culturally biased and/or ethnocentric. After all, half of the American population does not have a US passport, which limits their experiences and perspective. Additionally, while good rapport and cooperation generally exists between the European Union and the US, a war between Ukraine and Russia continues, and how the US responds can be of critical importance to the outcome. What prevents a global solution and cultural maturation? Are Europeans and Americans in parallel universes and stalled in cultural evolution? This is what makes our emphasis on quality of life – what it consists of and how to attain it – our paramount focus, not the most recent elections or victorious candidates and political parties here and abroad.

EI's premise is that **elevating quality of life requires a largely bottom-up approach** and a high-quality education that advances universal cooperation and critical thinking. We find this premise applicable to the European Union and the US, whose

members generally have a high quality of life and substantial resources that enable them to cooperate.

To this end, we have determined to focus on some of the obstacles that impede further progress and reverse the trends that are dysfunctional: growing inequality, authoritarianism, privatization, and hostility toward immigrants and people fleeing tyranny and poverty. It is our view that it is not for a lack of resources that massive problems exist, but how they are expended and allocated.

In approaching this paradox, EI has deliberately sought out critical partners in Spain, Norway, the US, and elsewhere that have transcended parochialism and are pursuing objectives in the context of quality of life. EI has also consolidated and leveraged its own resources to incentivize collaborative enterprises where transformative results are greatly needed, and the potential for transformation is improved. This includes expanding and deepening its relationship with Mondragon, engaging more broadly with organizations throughout the US to share knowledge and greatly strengthen interest and capacity for worker-owned cooperative development.



PROJECT HIGHLIGHT

EAST PASCO ACADEMY

East Pasco Academy is Tommytown community's first early learning center that provides a quality, bilingual, culturally sensitive education for a diverse group of low-income families.

- Cathy Fisher, Director & Londa Edwards, VPK Teacher and Assistant Director

East Pasco Academy graduated **14 students** from its **Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten (VPK)** program in May 2024 and started the new school year with **8 students** in the VPK class, later joined by **11 others**.

We extended our offerings to include **Before & After School Care and Summer Programs** for children up to age 10.

Our enrollment has continued to climb, and we are now having to start a waiting list for some age groups because we are at capacity in most classrooms.

This increase in enrollment has allowed us to hire some new staff members – some with over 20 years of experience – as well as offering a parttime position to a local high school student, who is receiving job training and experience.

While the Hurricane Milton left most of the school unscathed, we did lose most of our garden and some of our trees. We will be working with the University of South Florida (USF) to move and improve the garden this spring.

We continue to hold classes twice a year



with **Tabitha Villa, “Ms. V,”** the **Nutrition Educator** from **USF’s Health & Nutrition Program**, which is a great resource for our children and families to learn more about healthy eating and a healthy lifestyle.

The **Sertoma Speech & Hearing Foundation** came and evaluated the children for any concerns.

Our staff worked during the summer to repaint and **update the classrooms**, making them not only more beautiful, but more functional.

We have continued using the **Frog Street Curriculum** with our children and have noticed a significant improvement in several children’s behavior and emotional

regulation, as well as a higher level of academic success.

In December we hosted a **Holiday Program** for our children and families, where parents and families came to hear the children sing holiday songs that they had practiced for weeks, have some cookies and cocoa, and receive some gifts from the staff.

We continue to work with families: trying to **extend our assistance and reach into the families and communities**, assisting where possible with their needs, and working with the **Evolution Institute (EI)** to expand our programs and resources in order to help families holistically, not just the children we see at school.



Pastor Bruce Edwards

Operations Manager



Cathy Fisher

East Pasco Academy Director



Londa Edwards

East Pasco Academy Assistant Director

Mural by Londa at EPA >>>>>





PROJECT HIGHLIGHT

EDUCATIONAL EXPANSION: EPA AS A MODEL FOR REPLICATION AND COMMUNITY BUILDING

– Ljubica Sevic, Early Learning Program Developer

The Evolution Institute is distinguished from other think tanks because we purposely go beyond merely publishing and disseminating our research and findings; we implement our knowledge by engaging directly with people and organizations embedded in places like Tommytown. We engaged in an **international search for best practices**, in terms of how children learn and flourish, which mandate the full support of family and guardians. Consequently, building deep and trusting relationships with people and organizations in the neighborhood was essential, and this was truly a **grassroots bottom-up effort with the likelihood of sustainability**.

The creation of the East Pasco Academy at Tommytown gives testament to the joint effort

orchestrated with our partners: the Farmworkers Self-help and Resurrection House Mission, a congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. The children and families we serve reside in highly underserved neighborhoods, where real opportunity for social and economic mobility is most challenging, and social status is generally low.

According to the Early Learning Coalition of Pasco and Hernando Counties, the state agency that oversees administration of the School Readiness (SR) and Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) programs in our county, there's a lack of high-quality programs and affordable childcare in the underserved communities, not only in Pasco

County, but across the state. This encourages us to expand and replicate our efforts in other similar communities, where high-quality early learning opportunities are limited. Some organizations have toured our childcare facility and were impressed, prompting them to request our assistance in what they refer to as “**community wealth building.**”

EI is offering beneficial tools and resources that can be used in other communities around the state. Why not **expand our role** into technical assistance and **consulting partner** community organizations in developing early learning programs in their neighborhoods? We’re pleased to share that we have begun a collaborative partnership with one organization in a neighboring county and will be meeting with another in a nearby area in early 2025 to establish their needs. Our team will walk them through

the process and equip them with resources and best practices that will assist them to develop what we have built in Tommytown.

Like us, they recognize a high-quality early learning program can serve as an anchor institution and **hub for community development** and economic, educational, and health improvements.

EI’s expertise and ability to implement best practices in a neighborhood-based early learning center is one example of what appeals to other organizations working in similar neighborhoods. In addition, EI’s Operations Manager, Pastor Bruce Edwards, provides tours of the entire organizational facility and shares its history and immediate plans for growth: expanding the early learning center through primary grades and constructing affordable housing.



PROJECT SPOTLIGHT

Cambridge Elements Series

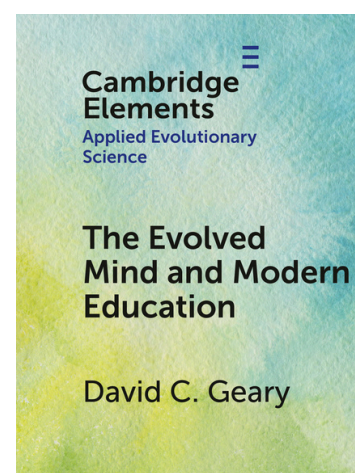
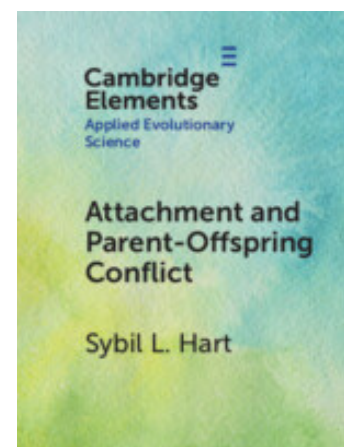
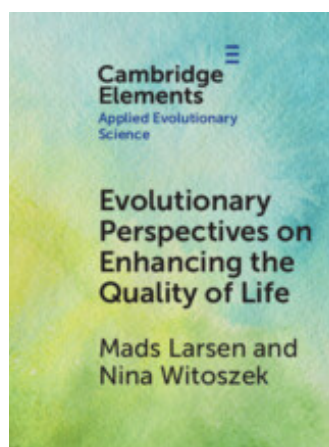
In July 2021 Cambridge University Press awarded EI a five-year contract to provide up to five Elements each year for its Cambridge Elements in Applied Evolutionary Science series. EI has contributed **10 issues over the past 2 years**. This series presents an advanced introduction to both foundational and emerging topics in Applied Evolutionary Science. Elements aims for broad coverage of all major topics within Applied Evolutionary Science, including: child and adolescent development; education; evolutionary medicine; public health; inequality; marriage, family, and mating; public policy; and group/social relations, among others.

Individual Cambridge Elements will be of interest to scholars, various types of practitioners (e.g., educators, social workers, community organizers), and public policymakers. At 20,000-30,000 words (40 to 75 pages), Elements are significantly longer than journal articles but shorter than a typical book. This hybrid format is in part a response to the frustration of authors in the social sciences with journal-article requirements that do not allow space to adequately contextualize and present research. By allowing greater freedom in word and page counts, the series enables authors to **publish their work at its natural length**.

The aim of Cambridge Elements in Applied Evolutionary Science is to become a leading reference publication in the field.

Research and reviews are presented in ways that are engaging for a range of readers - from interested laypeople to students and research academics.

Three **publications are slated for 2025**, and these appeared in 2024: “Evolutionary Perspectives on Enhancing Quality of Life,” by Mads Larsen and Nina Witoszek, “Attachment and Parent-Offspring Conflict; Origins in Ancestral Contexts of Breastfeeding and Multiple Caregiving,” by Sybil L. Hart and “The Evolved Mind and Modern Education,” by David Geary.



PROJECT SPOTLIGHT

WORKER OWNED CO-OPS AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

- Jerry Lieberman, El Co-founder & Secretary / Treasurer

During 2024, senior management in Mondragon Corporation sent us two highly significant documents that we were fortunate to receive for our early review. The first, **The Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Framework**, is the most extensive paper ever produced and published by Mondragon and was subsequently shared at a conference focused on cooperatives at the UN headquarters in New York. We're proud to provide it here because it is highly informative and readable and most professionally done.

Inigo Albizuri Landazaba, author of the second document, **Arizmendiarieta Social Economy Think Tank (ASETT)**, presented an earlier version to us in person 2023. He is the Vice-President of Communications and Public Affairs for Mondragon Corporation. Nagore Ipiña Larrañaga, a member of our Board of Directors and Dean of the Faculty of Humanities and Educational Sciences at Mondragon University, introduced us during our early November 2023 stay.

The ASETT document describes its unique organizational structure. It also details its aims, why it was being created, and when. Subsequent to the draft of ASETT Albizuri



shared with us, he presented it at an international conference in New Delhi, India, which the International Cooperative Association hosted - and then strongly endorsed his presentation. Next year ASETT will be formally launched in San Sebastian, Spain, on the northern Basque coastline. The Spanish government and the European Union have already provided significant funding for ASETT. However, ASETT is seeking global partners, and the Evolution Institute is strategically working toward inclusion.

PARTNERSHIPS

Our mission to apply science-based solutions to solve today’s most pressing social issues and improve quality of life would not be possible without the expertise and dedication of our partners:

- Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity
- Gamma Eta Chapter
- Early Learning Coalition Pasco-Hernando
- Farmworkers Self-Help
- Resurrection House
- Moore Mickens School
- Secular Student Alliance
- Catalyst Miami
- FL Service Employees International Union
- Lanki Institute of Cooperative Research
- Arne Naess Center University of Oslo
- Secular Student Alliance
- Cooperative Development Institute
- Saint Leo University
- Mondragon University
- Polish Robert Schuman Foundation
- Collegium Civitas
- Ruchu Europejskie
- Florida Rising
- Hillsborough County Clerk of the Court and Comptroller
- USAID
- St. Timothy Lutheran Church, ELCA
- Grace Alone Ministries, ELCA



PARTNER SPOTLIGHT

Florida Rising

Although the Evolution Institute has made significant strides in creating early learning centers that serve as hubs for community services, one particular community service critical for underserved citizens to gain a collective political voice was glaringly absent, and that is Florida Rising's focus: to build independent political power that centers historically marginalized communities so everyday Floridians shape the future.

EI Co-founder and Secretary/Treasurer Jerry Lieberman reached out to long-term EI Board member **Alphonso Mayfield**, who is also president of the Florida Public Service Union and is chairman of the Florida Rising Board. Alfonso agreed to introduce EI to Florida Rising Chief Strategy Officer, **Sheena Rolle**.

Sheena met with EI Operations Manager Bruce Edwards in October, who wrote to Alfonso, "We spent a wonderful day together: us introducing her to Tommytown and me learning more about her history and purpose with Florida Rising. I believe we both left with excitement about the opportunities that exist for us to work together on many levels. Her commitment and passion for the often-forgotten people of Florida is obvious and tangible."

Bruce added that Sheena was gracious enough to expose us to an opportunity to receive some much-needed relief funds for our community in the wake of Milton. He concluded that this connection could

lead to wonderful things for all our organizations and the communities we serve and thanked Alphonso on behalf of EI, Resurrection House, and Farmworkers Self-Help.

Florida Rising is one of several organizations around the state that have requested our assistance in "community wealth building." Like us, they recognize a **high-quality early learning center can serve as an anchor institution and hub for community development** and economic, educational, and health improvements.

EI is offering **beneficial tools and resources** that can be used in other communities around the state, such as those that have achieved significant strides in movement building, as Florida Rising has. Where there have been gaps in community development expertise and best practices for improving quality of life, we can combine our knowledge and resources with these communities to increase residents' ability to influence public policy and support and elect high-quality candidates. EI's expertise and ability to implement best practices in a neighborhood-based early learning center is one example of what appeals to other organizations working in similar neighborhoods. At the same time, the capacity and ability to **mobilize residents to gain political power** appeals to the EI and its community partners.

PARTNER SPOTLIGHT CONTINUED...

In early December, Jerry once again reached out to Alphonso emphasizing that its of great importance that EI builds upon the collaboration that he initiated between Florida Rising and EI. “Sheena Rolle has been great to work with and most helpful. I want to make sure we can be a real asset to her and Florida Rising.”

Such is how partnerships thrive, and Bruce and Sheena planned a meeting for early January.



PARTNER SPOTLIGHT

Tommytown Community: Farmworkers Self-Help and Resurrection House Mission

- Virginia Lieberman, EI Communications Director & Board Member



Last year the Evolution Institute’s Partner Spotlight featured our European partners in organizing the 2023 Warsaw Summit: Democracy Bottom-Up. This year we’re highlighting our local partners in Tommytown, the site of East Pasco Academy – our thriving early learning center. These partners include Farmworkers Self-Help and Resurrection House Mission, an Evangelical Lutheran Church in America congregation, also known as “Rez House.”

Margarita Romo is Founder and Executive Director of Farmworkers Self-Help, a 501(c)(3) that was incorporated in 1982. FSH works with immigrant Mexican farmworkers, Mexican-American

farmworkers, and former farmworkers to formulate solutions to the problems this population encounters. The organization also works with other poverty-entrapped and underserved groups in the Dade City community known as Tommytown and surrounding towns. It is **unique in its holistic blend of political organizing and providing direct services**. FSH addresses discriminatory/oppressive policies and practices that adversely affect its community and is always prepared for the next legislative session as new laws are still needed. The direct services arm came about because of a freeze that left hundreds of families stranded in the area with no work and no money to sustain themselves.



PARTNER SPOTLIGHT CONTINUED...



Over the years, FSH purchased parcels of the outlying property a mile north of downtown Dade City, the county seat. As EI's partner, it provided the property and building for East Pasco Academy at Tommytown (EPATT). Additionally, FSH shared expenses with EI and Rez House for the building's renovation and readiness to function as an early learning center with fencing and playground equipment. Together they secured staffing and enrolled children for the Fall 2020 school year - during the peak of the pandemic.

Bruce Edwards, EI's Operations Manager, is also Pastor of Rez House. The mission recruited the director and lead teacher for EPATT and has raised significant money through donations from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). Affiliation with the ELCA has resulted in donations from other churches regionally and statewide. With some of these

donations Rez House members provide the labor for the actual renovations, maintenance, and repairs to the school building.

The Evolution Institute provides research, curriculum oversight, technical assistance, and payroll and tax services. In 2024, the partners began plans to expand the early learning center to include Kindergarten and First Grade in a new building to be erected on the church's property, which is within walking distance. In preparation, EI hired recently retired **Ljubica Sevic**, Provider Relations Director of Pasco-Hernando Early Learning Coalition, as its **Early Learning Program Developer** and recruited former EI board member, **Dr. Darlene DeMarie**, as a volunteer educational advisor. The partners also discussed revitalizing a partnership with the Moore-Mickens African American community to provide to-be-determined educational opportunities in the facilities it has on the other side of Dade City, across the railroad tracks.

Looking Forward

- Jerry Lieberman, EI Co-founder & Secretary / Treasurer

We began Looking Forward last year with an appeal to not let pessimism, and certainly cynicism, undermine optimism. Considering the results of last year's elections, many of our readers might construe optimism as either delusional or naïve. The Evolution Institute is, after all, a science-based think tank that espouses prosocial behavior based on altruistic reciprocity and the UN Declaration of Human Rights. This year we are **celebrating its 15th anniversary** and hope to begin the process of achieving The Fair Society and the Pursuit of Justice – the title of Peter Corning's epic book based on the science of human nature – and ultimately beginning a new enlightenment.

We began this New Year focused on our (a) continued collaboration with our Basque region partners to sustain the successes of **Mondragon Corporation** and its worker-owned cooperatives, (b) participation in an international webinar that explored the potential proliferation of worker-owned cooperatives (details of this January 5 event sponsored by the USDA Interagency Working Group on Cooperative Development appeared in our [January newsletter](#)), and (c) commitment to expanding the services we provide to our early childhood learning center families as a community hub for replication in other similar underserved neighborhoods (details about organizations looking to EI as a model appeared in our [November newsletter](#)).

During 2024, Jerry Lieberman participated in extensive discussions with a prominent



economist and Mondragon researcher, and faculty leadership from Mondragon University about how EI could contribute to the sustainability of Mondragon Corporation. These conversations conveyed a perception that the executive class at Mondragon, as a whole, lacks full confidence in the cooperative model – possibly because workers hired in recent years have little appreciation for / understanding of cooperatives. A feedback loop results from this: the executive class projects to the rank-and-file what they really feel about cooperatives, and this serves to reinforce the latter's feelings and understanding of them. On a day-to-day basis for most workers, the result may very well be the perception that executives only pay lip service toward cooperativism. Consequently, the group recommends that EI, in cooperation with Mondragon University faculty, will collect data in 2025 regarding what **executives and workers are really thinking and what actually is occurring in the workplace**. Jointly they can then develop and take steps that will foster and support the

Looking forward, continued...



transformative strategies essential to sustain Mondragon Corporation and expand its global influence.

Following the aforementioned January 2025 webinar, when the lead-off speaker from Mondragon, Fred Freundlich, cited “the Evolution Institute and Jerry Lieberman, its cofounder, as **strong partners in the US who are furthering cooperative development,**” EI is now well-positioned to serve an important role for Mondragon, the world’s leading cooperative, to establish a beachhead for cooperatives in the US. This includes in, of all places, Florida – the epicenter providing the leadership for the new administration in Washington. The Heritage Foundation’s Project 2025, the centerpiece and blueprint for the administration is not an encumbrance. On the contrary, **our efforts to strengthen the working class to have a greater voice and better outcomes** in the workplace is appealing, in principle, to the Heritage Foundation and the Trump and Desantis administrations.

Last year we also wrote about the

importance of **relationship-building between organizations in Florida** and EI’s formidable role to this endeavor. This year we are building on the relationships we have actualized through our early learning center and activities in one of Florida’s most underserved communities, Tommytown, which is a mile northwest of the county seat of Pasco County in Dade City. Properly nurturing infants and toddlers is not a contentious issue; rather, it holds universal appeal to highly diverse populations and is not perceived as partisan in any way. Therefore, a strong support for quality early learning centers exists with a great need for more. Pasco, one of the fastest growing counties in the fastest growing state, is clearly a great place to focus.

Some of Florida’s largest and most respected community engagement organizations have been reflecting on why their efforts to increase citizen participation throughout the state have not been very successful. These are organizations that have far more resources than EI, and they are now highly interested in visiting Tommytown and learning more about how we conduct community engagement and improve quality of life – regardless of which political party governs Florida or the US. This receptivity to learn from us is unprecedented. We are, in turn, **building our capacity to self-improve and serve other communities** and organizations in our region of the state and beyond. Originally, we had asked the director, lead teacher, and EI Operations Manager to ask caregivers of children in our school what they think about our

Looking forward, continued...



program, ways to improve it, and services we might be add. With the assistance of **student interns from Saint Leo University** – who are senior honors students and receive academic credits – families with children in our early learning center and people receiving services provided by Farmworkers Self-help will be interviewed.

The objective is to **build on our foundation** and work toward enhancements: expanding our services, providing a kind of **one-stop shop**. Our interview and survey questions seek to gain insights about our existing services and learn more about ways to serve families holistically. In addition to the interns, we have a social worker who is skilled in gathering information in ways that are not intrusive or threatening. Ljubica Selvic has recommended surveys and interview approaches that are commercially available and have been tested and validated.

A condensed version of Mondragon’s pre-pandemic, November 2019, Territorial Analysis of Pasco County may provide stimulation for resident stakeholders to determine what merit this prior analysis has – and what needs to be added. Is there interest in employment and business

opportunities that might result in our **providing training and education that presently isn't available** or appears inadequate? And is there interest in learning more about cooperatives as a way to improve the community? Determining which types of cooperatives would guide EI’s provision of training, education, and accessible technical assistance.

And finally, a critically important step the EI Board will be taking this year is addressing EI’s sustainability, which will require a multi-pronged effort and varied strategies. We are already planning to implement one prong: At the year-end 2024 board meeting, we discussed **creating an endowment** and agreed, in principle, to do so. In 2025 we will complete and likely approve policy that determine terms and conditions for the endowment. We anticipate the endowment will become viable when there is a minimum of \$500,000 in our reserve account at Stifel, the investment bank that will serve as its fiduciary and advisor. We are confident that our opening amount goal will be realized well before the end of 2025, and we will make a decision to start using dividends that accrue from our equity/bonds based on approved policy and guidelines. Here’s to **15 more years!**



Evolutionary scientists have shown that altruism is deeply rooted in human nature, and we know that quality of life depends on people like you who care for others. With your support, we can make an impact in 2025 and for years to come.

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