While foreign-born citizens come to the United States for many reasons, immigration is ultimately about one thing: the promise of America.
Immigrants truly believe in this nation and all we have to offer. Their faith in the American ideal is strong and reflects the same spirit that’s been a cornerstone of our country since its founding more than two centuries ago.

That’s important, too. Because in the ongoing debate over immigration policy, the image of the newly arrived has often been mischaracterized. The fact is, those who come here are largely hard-working, family oriented, and have a passion for the values we all share — the values that will continue to sustain us as people, and as a paragon of freedom, long into the future.

But perhaps just as important, most of them have come to America because they have chosen to be Americans.

Neighborhood Centers Inc. is not a legislative or enforcement organization. We don’t advocate a specific immigration policy. Our mission is to ensure that when people arrive in Houston — regardless of their origin or status, or whether they come to pursue a better life or to flee political oppression — they have the opportunity to pursue not simply the American Dream, but the Human Dream.

Our hope is that a better understanding of the immigrant community will help shape policies that preserve this opportunity — and keep the promise of America alive for anyone willing to work for it.
**MYTH:** IMMIGRANTS HAVE A NEGATIVE IMPACT ON THE U.S. ECONOMY.

**FACT:** Immigrants – documented and undocumented – have a net positive impact on the nation’s total economic output, raising it by a reported $21.5 billion per year (*USA Today*). And, according to *Business Week*, undocumented immigrants have become an important source of growth for U.S. banks, insurers, credit card providers, and phone carriers.

**MYTH:** SENDING UNDOCUMENTED WORKERS BACK TO THEIR NATIVE COUNTRIES WOULD HAVE NO REAL NEGATIVE ECONOMIC EFFECT.

**FACT:** The impact would actually be significant. Rice sociology professor Stephen Klineberg says, “America is totally dependent on the hard work and wages of these workers. They are critical to the economic success and well-being of America.” The Pew Hispanic Center says industries that would be particularly affected are service (32 percent of workers are unauthorized); construction (19 percent), production-installation-repair (15 percent); sales and administrative support (12 percent); and management, business, and professional (10 percent).

**MYTH:** IMMIGRANTS SEND EVERYTHING THEY EARN BACK TO THEIR COUNTRY OF ORIGIN.

**FACT:** There’s no question that immigrants do send some of their earnings back to family members. But there’s also no question as to the importance of their buying power. Take Hispanics, for example. Hispanic buying power nationally has soared, according to the Pew Hispanic Center: It was $490 billion in 2000, $736 billion in 2005, and is estimated to reach $1.09 trillion in 2010 (or about 9.2 percent of all U.S. buying power). The trend in Texas is similar: Pew says Hispanic buying power was $87.4 billion in 2000, rose to $127.4 billion in 2005, and is expected to reach $188.7 billion in 2010.

**MYTH:** UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANTS’ USE OF PUBLIC SERVICES IS NEGATIVELY AFFECTING OUR ECONOMY.

**FACT:** According to a study by the investment research company Standard & Poor’s, the cost of providing services to undocumented immigrants is largely offset by the economic benefits they generate. Concludes one researcher: “From an economic standpoint, it’s much ado about something very, very small, almost insignificant.”
MYTH: IMMIGRANTS DRIVE DOWN WAGES FOR AMERICAN WORKERS.
FACT: Economic researchers have concluded that income inequality on the bottom half of the wage scale has not grown since the mid-1980s. While there has been a general decline in real wages for low-skilled workers, a senior economist for the Dallas Federal Reserve says studies show it is largely unaffected by immigrants. According to The New York Times: “There is scant evidence that illegal immigrants have caused any significant damage to the wages of American workers.” The fact is that the real predictor of wage disparity is not whether someone is an immigrant — regardless of status — or native born. It’s education.

MYTH: IMMIGRANTS ONLY PERFORM MENIAL LABOR WHEN THEY COME TO THE UNITED STATES.
FACT: Pia Orrenius, a senior economist and immigration expert with the Dallas Federal Reserve, estimates that 40 percent of the nation’s Ph.D. scientists and engineers were born in another country. Beyond that, foreign-born entrepreneurs have been behind 25 percent of all U.S. technology startups over the past 10 years, according to researchers at Duke University. Finally, studies by the Migration Policy Institute show that 27 percent of new computer-software engineers are immigrants, and that one in five U.S. doctors are foreign born, as are two in five medical scientists; one in five computer specialists; one in six people in engineering or science occupations; one in four astronomers, physicists, chemical, and material scientists; and one in six biological scientists.

MYTH: MOST UNDOCUMENTED WORKERS ARE DAY LABORERS.
FACT: Figures compiled by researchers from UCLA, the University of Illinois, and New School University in New York suggest that fewer than two percent of the estimated 7.5 million undocumented workers are day laborers.

MYTH: UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANTS WORK ALMOST EXCLUSIVELY IN LOW-INCOME JOBS.
FACT: Undocumented workers make up less than 10 percent of the 43 million low-wage workers in the United States, according to the Pew Hispanic Center.

MYTH: UNDOCUMENTED WORKERS COME HERE TO GET FREE GOVERNMENT SERVICES.
FACT: Most come here to work. Of the estimated 11.5- to 12-million undocumented immigrants living in America, 7.5 million are employed, and undocumented men come here almost exclusively to work. Their labor force participation — 96 percent — exceeds that of men who are legal immigrants or U.S. citizens (“Undocumented Immigrants: Facts and Figures,” The Urban Institute). Moreover, undocumented immigrants are ineligible for welfare, food stamps, Medicaid, and most other forms of public assistance.

MYTH: UNDOCUMENTED WORKERS ARE STEALING LOW-WAGE JOBS THAT AMERICANS NEED.
FACT: There’s no evidence that immigrants have an impact on the employment outcomes of native-born workers who have low levels of education and are aged 25-34. In fact, there is evidence that immigrants actually create jobs. For example, the efforts of a single farm worker support three jobs in the surrounding economy — equipment, processing, insurance, farm lending — that would otherwise disappear (Republican U.S. Sen. George Voinovich of Ohio, cited in The Wall Street Journal).
**MYTH:** UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANTS DON’T PAY TAXES.
**FACT:** The U.S. Social Security Administration has estimated that three-quarters of undocumented immigrants pay payroll taxes, and that they annually contribute $7 billion in Social Security funds that they will be unable to claim and $1.5 billion to Medicare. They also pay income taxes, and those who own homes pay property taxes—as do renters, in the form of pass-throughs—that support education, healthcare, and other services.

**MYTH:** IMMIGRANTS GET HEALTHCARE FOR FREE AND ARE CAUSING COSTS TO SKYROCKET.
**FACT:** According to research published in *The American Journal of Public Health*, 30 percent of immigrants use no healthcare at all during a year; most immigrants have health insurance; immigrant children had healthcare expenditures that were 74 percent lower than those for U.S.-born children; and immigrants account for more than 10 percent of the U.S. population, but only 7.9 percent of total health spending and 8 percent of government health spending. The researchers concluded: “Our study refutes the assumption that immigrants represent a disproportionate financial burden on the U.S. healthcare system.”

**MYTH:** UNDOCUMENTED WORKERS WORSEN THE BUDGET DEFICIT BY TAKING SERVICES THEY NEVER PAY FOR.
**FACT:** Immigrant workers actually save the country money. When they come to America, they typically go to work immediately. So they begin contributing to the economy almost instantly, without incurring the “upfront costs”—education, healthcare, unemployment compensation, etc.—that might otherwise be incurred through age 18.

**MYTH:** UNDOCUMENTED WORKERS TAKE MONEY OUT OF SOCIAL SECURITY WITHOUT PAYING INTO IT.
**FACT:** It is estimated that more than $519 billion in earnings has been reported to Social Security on behalf of workers who will not be able to draw retirement from the system. Those contributions add up to about 10 percent of the system’s total surplus. The Center for Urban Economic Development at the University of Illinois-Chicago estimates that undocumented workers generate between $6 billion and $7 billion annually in Social Security tax revenues. So without undocumented workers, the system would actually be in worse shape. And because they tend to be younger, and will thus be in the workforce longer, these workers will actually be helping to finance the retirement of Baby Boomers—whose numbers are expected to strain Social Security.
**MYTH:** MOST UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANTS STREAM ACROSS THE BORDER FROM MEXICO.

**FACT:** The nation’s undocumented immigrants come from all over the world. While it is true that more than half come from Mexico, the remainder come from Central America, Asia, Africa, Canada, Europe, and South America. They’re not “streaming” across the borders, either. In fact, between 25 and 40 percent of the undocumented immigrants in America entered legally and subsequently over-stayed visas or otherwise violated the terms of their admission (“Undocumented Immigrants: Myths and Reality,” The Urban Institute).

**MYTH:** EVERYONE IN AN UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANT’S FAMILY IS “ILLEGAL.”

**FACT:** Four-fifths of children of immigrants were born in the United States and are thus U.S. citizens, according to the Urban Institute. Most children of immigrants (61 percent in 2003) live in families where one or more children are citizens but one or both parents are non-citizens. In families where parents are undocumented, two-thirds of children are U.S.-born citizens.

**MYTH:** IMMIGRANTS ARE NOT AS FAMILY-FOCUSED AS NATIVE-BORN AMERICANS.

**FACT:** The family structure is strong among immigrants. For example, The Urban Institute estimates that 80 percent of children of immigrants lived with two parents in 1999, compared with 70 percent of non-immigrants. In fact, one of the reasons poverty tends to be higher among immigrant families is because the second parent — typically the mother — stays at home to raise the children rather than entering the labor force.

**MYTH:** UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANTS CAN’T AFFORD TO LIVE ANYWHERE BUT SMALL APARTMENTS.

**FACT:** The truth is, home purchases by undocumented workers could result in $60 billion in mortgages over the next few years. More than 150,000 undocumented immigrants who rent could afford a $98,000 home, according to the National Association of Hispanic Real Estate Professionals.

**MYTH:** THE CHILDREN OF UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANTS ABUSE THEIR RIGHT TO PUBLIC SERVICES.

**FACT:** While these children are eligible for public assistance because they were born in the United States, their unauthorized parents may be reluctant to seek them for fear of deportation. So they neither use nor abuse public services.

**MYTH:** SOCIAL SERVICE AGENCIES HAVE NO BUSINESS HELPING THE CHILDREN OF UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANTS.

**FACT:** The role of social service organizations is to help people in need, and many children of undocumented workers fit that description. More live in lower-income families than do children of native-born Americans — 54 percent vs. 36 percent, The Urban Institute estimates. Yet these children are unlikely to receive aid — welfare, food stamps, housing assistance, etc. — because their parents may be non-citizens and ineligible for help or afraid to seek it for fear of being deported.
**MYTH:** UNDOCUMENTED WORKERS ARE HURTING THE TEXAS ECONOMY.

**FACT:** A report from the Comptroller’s office shows that the Texas economy would be about $18 billion poorer without undocumented workers. That represents about 2.1 percent of our gross state product, which is the measure of all goods and services produced here.

**MYTH:** UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANTS ARE COSTING THE STATE IN TERMS OF SERVICES THEY USE.

**FACT:** Undocumented immigrants produced $1.58 billion in state revenues in Fiscal 2005, according to the Comptroller’s report, about $400 million more than they accounted for in services used. While the report does point out that there is an impact to local governments related to healthcare and law enforcement, it is offset by the estimated $513 million in sales and local taxes these immigrants pay. The overall effect on the statewide economy is positive.

**MYTH:** UNDOCUMENTED WORKERS ARE BAD FOR THE STATE’S LABOR FORCE.

**FACT:** The Comptroller’s report estimates that without undocumented workers, the Texas workforce would shrink by 6.1 percent. Removing undocumented workers from the state would create a “noticeable tightening in labor markets,” the report concludes.
MYTH: UNDOCUMENTED WORKERS CONTRIBUTE NOTHING OF VALUE TO HOUSTON'S ECONOMY.
FACT: Undocumented workers contribute an estimated $27.3 billion to the region’s gross regional product, or about 8.4 percent of total GRP, according to the Greater Houston Partnership.

MYTH: UNDOCUMENTED WORKERS IN HOUSTON PERFORM PRIMARILY MENIAL LABOR.
FACT: Undocumented workers are represented in 16 different economic sectors. Construction, accommodation and food services, manufacturing, and professional and business services are the largest employers (20 percent, 17 percent, 14 percent, and 13 percent, respectively). Other sectors whose workforce include a significant number of undocumented workers include wholesale and retail trade, healthcare and social assistance, and finance and insurance.