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### COPS/Metro Alliance - StMU Oral Histories with Linda Davila

Kensley Dieckow

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# COPS/Metro Alliance-StMU Oral Histories

**Narrator:** Linda Davila

**Date:** 03/26/2024

**Location:** Interviewed in San Antonio, Texas

**Interview Session:** 1 of 1

**Interviewer:** Kensley Dieckow

**Transcribed By:** Kensley Dieckow

## **Narrator's Biographical Information:**

Linda Davila is a COPS / Metro (Communities Organized for Public Service) Leader from St. Timothy Parish on San Antonio's West Side. Linda's COPS journey started when she was only in high school, with one of the original COPS institutions in 1974. As she went on to college and started a family of her own, she became less actively involved in the organization. It wasn't until 10-12 years ago, that she rejoined COPS / Metro as a Pastoral Chair at St. Timothy Parish. She continued her work as Housing Co-Chair and leader for COPS / Metro.

## **Summary of Interview:**

In the oral history interview of Linda Davila, she reflects on her involvement with COPS, starting from its early days in 1974 when the organization tackled issues like flooding, to her recent efforts, as a leader from St. Timothy Parish, in advocating for affordable housing. Linda discusses the importance of community listening sessions and the role personal stories played in her passion for social justice. Despite changes in community support and expansion of COPS / Metro's reach across San Antonio, the organization remains dedicated to listening to community needs and relationship building. Looking ahead, Linda sees COPS / Metro continuing to develop new leaders and expanding its institutional memberships in San Antonio.

## **Interview Key Terms:**

COPS / Metro (Communities Organized for Public Service)

St. Timothy's Catholic Church

Flooding

Affordable Housing

Bond

Listening Session

Social Justice

**Length of Interview:** 00:13:27

**Format:** Audio File

**File Name:** Davila.Linda.2024-KD.m4a

**Restrictions:** n/a

**Are the consent forms complete?** Yes.

**Linda Davila Interview Index**

<b>Time Stamp</b>	<b>Theme or Topic</b>
00:27	COPS / Metro Early Involvement and Flooding
02:24	St. Timothy Parish and Affordable Housing
06:16	Community Involvement and Relationship Building
12:30	The Future of COPS / Metro

### **Linda Davila Interview**

Kensley Dieckow 0:01

This is the COPS (Communities Organized for Public Service) oral history interview with Kensley Dieckow interviewing Linda Davila on March 26 2024, at the National Archives of the Marianist Province of the United States at St. Mary's University in San Antonio, Texas. So thank you so much again for letting me and my classmates interview you. So first, would you like to start by stating your name and then your role within COPS?

Linda Davila 0:26

Sure. My name is Linda Davila and I am a leader from St. Timothy's Catholic Church, a COPS / Metro leader yeah. I actually started with one of the original institutions back in '74 [1974]. When a friend of mine went to the Saul Alinsky school in Chicago, came back fired up. And we were at St. Stephen's, and she decided... I followed her because she was like a mentor and helped me with the first issue that COPS tackled back then was, flooding. I remember, the days when we knew it was going to rain a lot. We would pray that it didn't because we knew somebody was gonna die in the floods, especially on the south and west parts of town. There was no drainage to speak of. So that was the first issue we tackled and we were really successful because... We were worried at first, well we didn't have enough people show up at City Hall, to show them that this is a problem with what happened, a big rainstorm came like, two days before we're going to meet with the county. Sure enough people died, and so we had almost five hundred people show up for that meeting. The city looked into it and they said, you know, there's been money allocated, but it was never got to it. And we were ignored.

Linda Davila 2:07

But after that meeting, we got like \$40 million in funding [Wow] for the neighborhood. And it just, it built from there. After that, I graduated from high school, so then I went to college, got married, had kids, so I wasn't really involved. I mean, I still followed on them but it wasn't until about 10-12 years ago, I got back into COPS / Metro. And that was as my role as a Pastoral Council Chair at St. Timothy's. You know we lead a, what we call listening sessions in COPS / Metro. That's where we hear from the people, our community, what's on your mind? What's keeping you up at night? What's keeping you from coming to church? You know, what can we help with? And at that time the number one issue was housing in our community, at St. Timothy's, people were living in houses that were about to fall on them. Or they couldn't afford to repair. They needed help with the deeds. That was the number one.

Linda Davila 3:18

So, we started working on [indiscernible]. We took it, COPS / Metro took it on to get more money for owner occupied rehabilitation assistance for homeowners. The city's budget grew from like, for owner occupied rehab from \$1.6 million, to today with over \$35 million [Wow]. And we helped push that, push that through. And this time around we had the charter revision that allowed bond money to be used for affordable housing. So we had a victory in getting \$150 million for affordable housing through the bond that was passed in 2022. It's really been impactful, that makes me feel good that I was a part of that in different aspects.

Kensley Dieckow 4:27

Linda Davila by Kensley Dieckow

So, outside of you know, housing and the flooding crisis, whenever you rejoined COPS, was there any issues that you know you personally were really passionate about?

Linda Davila 4:40

Well, not really because, like I said, I had been out of it for a while. My main concern back then was raising my family and keeping that going. But once I heard the stories you know, COPS / Metro is all about personal stories. Hearing what's on people's mind. And when I heard those stories, I heard during our listening sessions, housing did become my passion. And as recently as last year, we have another victory. Our neighbors across the street from St. Timothy, the public housing. They've been around seven years, and they've had very little attention paid to them. No one should be living like they're living, you know. And so we got the city's attention on that, and we were able to work with our Councilwoman to get a fund, some kind of maintenance fund in the city. It's reoccurring now, it's for \$1 million, and it goes towards immediate needs for the residents. So that was a big win for us. Still have a long way to go to improve their conditions, but that's a big win.

Kensley Dieckow 6:09

So in what ways has COPS, you know, remain consistent or the same from when you first joined to now joining again?

Linda Davila 6:19

It's always listening to the community members, and what the needs are, what the issues are, that's always the start of any action, the research that we have to do. And that hasn't changed. And building relationships, that has not changed. It's all about building relationships with each other, with our collaborators, our enemies, even with our enemies, what we would call enemies. it's all about building relationships, that hasn't changed.

Kensley Dieckow 6:56

So and then, in what ways has the organization changed?

Linda Davila 7:01

Besides getting bigger and expanding, before we were concentrated institutions on the West Side and the South Side. And then when Metro came along, the East Side as well. But now we're across the entire city and even outside city limits, but still in the county [Bexar]. Like Our Lady of Guadalupe [Catholic Church] in Helotes is a part of our membership, as well as, El Carmen [Catholic Church] way down south town [San Antonio]. So expanding.

Kensley Dieckow 7:36

Have you experienced any challenges in your personal life as a result of your work in social justice? Whether it be time management...

Linda Davila 7:54

I had a husband that was very supportive of my work. So without that support, I wouldn't have been able to do everything I did. That really... One time I was asked, something about my dedication to it. And if you ask my husband, he'll say it's 100% \*laughing\*. I was always offering something. [indiscernible]. But currently, our pastor he's not really supporting our efforts

Linda Davila by Kensley Dieckow

that much. I don't know if it's across all ministry there at church, or because he's so busy with other stuff. As far as social justice, it's not his priority. Whereas, the pastor we had before, I mean he's the one that recruited me right \*laughing\*. So he's got to know about all the work that COPS has done. So, that's kind of a little barrier we have to work with at St. Timothy's.

Kensley Dieckow 9:05

How have you grown as a person or what have you learned about yourself from your work with COPS?

Linda Davila 9:12

Well, I learned that I have in me to talk to people that I may have thought, Oh, I can't talk him, he's a mayor, or he's the governor. You know, so like, I can talk to anyone if I do my research, I look at the actions needed. I can meet one-on-one or in a group with somebody like that. That confidence, through the training I've received within COPS / Metro.

Kensley Dieckow 9:47

Do you have a proudest moment from working with COPS?

Linda Davila 9:59

\*pauses for a moment to think\*

Linda Davila 10:00

I think getting the charter changed to allow affordable housing money to be raised through bonds is one of the greatest things I've accomplished or been part through COPS / Metro. I mean that's just a tiny buckle of what we need you know. It's a start, and I think that's what I'm most proud of.

Kensley Dieckow 10:44

Was there ever a time where you interacted with people or groups that were opposed to COPS? Or you know, what was like the public perception during the time when you first joined?

Linda Davila 10:58

Yeah, I think... I know that, within our community at St. Timothy, a lot of people still have this image of COPS / Metro being really radical and pushy and loud \*laughs\*. And that's how it was really for us to get our voices heard early on. Now, we're still loud and pushy, but in a different kind of way. And actually, dealing with our own members in our community and trying to get them not to think about how to [indiscernible]. It's really different when justice is part of our ministry really, and in the Catholic faith. I mean, Pope Francis advocates for it all the time, and we have to smell like the sheep, we have to be out there helping those that are most vulnerable. So it's really people within our community that we have to get them over that attitude.

Kensley Dieckow 12:14

So, you know, COPS is coming up on its 50th anniversary. So where would you like to see COPS 50 years from now? Or what do you think COPS needs to do to ensure that it celebrates its centennial anniversary?

Linda Davila by Kensley Dieckow

Linda Davila 12:30

And I know it will. Continuing to develop leaders, expanding the institutions that are members of COPS. And we need to somehow get a younger generation involved, for sure. It'll grow. I know it will grow to more institutions. But we have to keep in mind that, new leaders, continue that training of new leaders to take over the work.

Kensley Dieckow 13:09

Well, thank you so much. I know that you've done quite a few interviews. So we'll make sure that our instructor's reaching out to the COPS organization, make sure you all get the transcripts and recordings as well.

Linda Davila 13:22

All right, sounds good. .

Kensley Dieckow 13:23

Thank you so much.

Linda Davila 13:25

Nice meeting you.

Kensley Dieckow 13:25

Nice meeting you too.

**Transcription Notes:** This interview was lightly edited as needed for readability which may include inserting paragraph breaks, removing redundant words, or adding clarifying words. Added words or words difficult to decipher typically appear inside brackets.