Thanks to this program, we had the privilege of lifting the
LAS MADRES Y LOS POLITICOS

Ask a Latina mother what she wants to talk with her elected representatives about, and you’ll get a two-word answer: global warming. Ask why, and you’ll get another two-word answer: my kids.

EcoMadres will help her. It’s a program that connects mothers and elected officials, and the focus is on their children. Gabriela Rivera, who oversees EcoMadres’ field organizers across the United States, explains: “Many Latinos reside in communities that suffer the impacts of air pollution and climate change disproportionately. And their children have asthma as result. They often miss school and have to go to the doctor. Their parents have to miss work to take care of them, which complicates family life and sometimes puts pay-checks at risk.”

For EcoMadres, issues of immigration and climate change are linked. Gabriela points out, “You hear on the news that families coming to the US are fleeing corruption and violence. But you don’t often hear that they’re also coming because of climate change. Flooding. Heat. Drought. Their crops dying. Food is unavailable. Those things are equally important.”

EcoMadres came into being when Moms Clean Air Force and Green Latinos formed a partnership. It has expanded to include a broad cross-section of Latino organizations, and it plans to reach further into more communities where Latinos live and work. EcoMadres educates, engages, and empowers members to have conversations with their lawmakers about the environment’s effects on their children’s health.

Once they learn how to tell their personal stories and feel comfortable enough, they meet with their members of Congress and their states’ legislators, and talk about issues that impact them personally. They may also bring their children. When there are hearings in Washington, DC, EcoMadres

we have the voices of so many.”

GABRIELA RIVERA & DOMINIQUE BROWNING
often mobilizes its members to attend so they can provide face-to-face testimony.

EcoMadres also supplies members with “naptime note cards” so mothers can write to their representatives while their kids are sleeping.

“We hand deliver naptime notes to senators and representatives,” says Gabriela, “and we explain that the cards enable them to hear from constituents who aren’t able to come to their offices.”

The best way to learn about EcoMadres—and get naptime note cards—is to participate in a Cafecito. Volunteers lead get-togethers in community centers, churches, living rooms—places that lend themselves to informal conversations.

Cafecitos are the soul of EcoMadres. They take place every few weeks and focus on environmental issues that impact children’s health and how to advocate for policies that protect them.

EcoMadres has chapters in a dozen states with more to come, and you can attend a Cafecito in any of them. Chances are, you’ll also be able to feast on pan dulce, a Mexican pastry, or perhaps a pambazo (a Mexican bread filled with potato and chorizo, then dipped in pepper sauce and fried). Is your mouth watering?

Gabriela Rivera was born in Chihuahua, Mexico. She explains, “My parents instilled in me the ideas of hard work and motivation, and the need to make this world a better place for all.”

After earning a Master’s degree in Public Affairs from the University of San Francisco, and working as a political organizer, Gabriela led the creation of EcoMadres.

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so many and inspiring people across the country.

"I'm often asked about our name, which I love. It’s three words in one. ‘Eco’ represents the environment. ‘Madres’ represents mothers. And ‘comadres’ are a co-parent or godmother in the Latino community. So when you say, ‘She is my comadre,’ you're creating a family where you don’t have to be blood-related, you just have to care about the same issues and be willing to advocate for the same reasons."

If you'd like to become an EcoMadre, you can sign up at the Moms Clean Air Force's website. And your kids can become EcoNiños.
MOTHERHOOD FIRST

"Being a mom not only comes first for me, it informs my political activism," says Dominique Browning, mother of two sons, grandmother of one, writer, and accomplished political organizer.

Dominique co-founded Moms Clean Air Force in 2011 to explain climate change to mothers and other non-scientists so they could engage government officials and change laws.

Today, Dominique is senior director of an organization of a million plus moms (and dads) across the United States that works to ensure that laws that protect children's health and well-being are as strong as they can be.

I invite Dominique to share the ways her members—and the rest of us—can be most effective influencing elected officials about climate change.

She smiles: "I have a vivid image because this happens so often when we go with mothers to visit the Senate. They pause outside the building and ask, 'Are you sure it's okay to be here? Are we allowed to walk these halls?'" It reminds me that our political processes are so far from our daily experiences that we've lost touch with them.

"The first time moms visit elected officials, the most important thing we do is help them cross the threshold into political engagement. Whether it's visiting members of Congress or their staffs, or calling on local and state elected officials, we invite them to cross that threshold and make the visit. We point out that elected officials want to hear from them, and that it makes a big difference when you contact the people who represent you.

"The second thing is, we make sure our members are educated on the issues, so they can respond to pushback.

"We also urge people to tell their own stories about losing their houses, crops, animals, or health. This is especially true for women who come from areas that have been ravaged by floods, wildfires, or any of the other ways climate change is super-charging destructive weather events.

"Meetings are the most effective way to communicate with elected officials, especially meetings with staff members. People forget (or don't know) how
important staff members are. Sometimes it's better to meet them in district offices, rather than Washington, DC. They usually report to the Washington office daily. And you can have a more intimate connection.

"Handwriting personal letters can also be important. The bottom line is that the more personal the touch, the more important the touch.

"Reach out to your city's mayor and its legislators. For example, if you live in Houston and your mayor wants to develop a climate plan, volunteer to help; say, 'Way to go; we need that.'

"We've also gotten deeply involved with the Environmental Protection Agency. Often things can be done through regulation rather than legislation, so we visit EPA people at every level.

"You could spend all day influencing people. It's useful to contact your local Walmart and say, 'Saw the solar panels on your roof; give us more!' Or your local utility and say, 'Make my energy mix renewable.'

"We coordinate campaigns via our website (MomsCleanAirForce.org), so our members can communicate at the same time about national legislation that's happening, regulations that are pertinent, or events such as Earth Day.

"Climate impacts tend to be local, so local Moms Clean Air Force organizers generate discussions and convene meetings that might happen around a dinner table, over a cup of coffee, or at a school. Sometimes local organizers bring in speakers, perhaps a pediatrician, to talk about the health impacts of extreme weather and its connection to climate change.

"Our goal is to explain to people how many different avenues there are for change, and to simplify the process so they understand what to talk about."
WHAT YOU CAN DO

1. Talk with your kids and grandkids about the climate they’ll live with in the future, and what you can do together to improve it.

2. Vote.


4. Demand wind and/or solar from your local power company.

5. Buy a car that gets high gas mileage, is a hybrid, or electric. And drive it prudently. Speeding increases pollution from tailpipes.