

Stories from the **Community**

This case study is part of a series of stories from residents, business owners, workers, and others who have shaped — or been shaped by — the implementation of the California Transformative Climate Communities grant program (TCC). To learn more about TCC, visit: <https://innovation.luskin.ucla.edu/tcc/>.

Documenting these stories is part of UCLA Luskin Center for Innovation's evaluation of groundbreaking progress in seven TCC communities: Fresno, Ontario, Pomona, Stockton, and the Los Angeles neighborhoods of Northeast San Fernando Valley, South Los Angeles, and Watts.

Legal Workshops and Clinics Empower Renters to Advocate for their Housing Rights

This profile documents TCC-funded South LA Eco-Lab's Displacement Avoidance Plan that gives South LA residents the legal support and policy education needed to navigate residential and commercial lease challenges. This story highlights Martin Nunez, a small business owner, who participated in a commercial lease legal workshop hosted by Strategic Actions for a Just Economy (SAJE), and Edgar Estrada, who attended several of SAJE's legal clinics to obtain advice about his residential rental lease. Learn more about South LA's Displacement Avoidance Plan.

Interviews for this case study were conducted in May of 2025.

MARTIN NUNEZ arrived in the U.S. from Mexico in 1994 to work within the agriculture industry in California's Central Valley. Having grown up in Mexico City, Nunez missed the hustle and bustle of a larger city, and in 2010, decided Los Angeles would be a better fit for his goal of owning his own business. Nunez came to South LA with some friends and began to get to know the community. Nunez was able to obtain a work permit and ultimately received U.S. citizenship.

“ I decided, with some friends, to come to Los Angeles. For me, that was life, because I lived like this in Mexico.

Decidí, con unos amigos, venirme a Los Ángeles. Para mí esa era la vida, porque yo vivía en México así.

— **MARTIN NUNEZ**



Martin Nunez stands in front of the commercial space he rents for his South LA salon. Credit: SAJE

Back in Mexico, Nunez had worked in a hair salon and sought to continue his livelihood as a hairstylist. After receiving the appropriate licenses, he started Pinky Beauty Salon in South LA. This location was important because Nunez grew up in a major city and valued that lifestyle. Subsequently, the neighborhood has become home to Nunez.

In January 2025, Senate Bill 1103, the Commercial Tenant Protection Act, came into effect with significant protections for commercial tenants. Those who qualify, including small business owners like Nunez, would have the right to a negotiated lease agreement and notices of lease termination or rental increase for the first time.

Shortly after the bill's implementation, Nunez struggled to manage a conflict with his commercial landlord. Strategic Actions for a Just Economy's (SAJE) outreach team came to his business to share commercial renting resources. Initially, he was skeptical of free resources because he and others had previously sought legal advice and knew the typical cost of speaking with an attorney was out of their budget. Meeting directly with SAJE's Displacement Avoidance Plan street team helped ease his skepticism. Nunez has attended SAJE workshops and legal clinics in person and via Zoom, where he learned about his rights as a commercial tenant. This type of work is an integral piece of the broader South LA Eco-Lab Displacement Avoidance Plan, which is intended to help close gaps in awareness of commercial rental policy and thereby foster a more just and sustainable economy for local small business owners.

“ We're able to speak with a lawyer, and they give us 30 minutes to speak with them. It's a surprising thing, and thank God that it is like this, because in other places they charge us, and they [SAJE] do not charge us to speak or discuss a case with a lawyer. Half an hour is free, so that helps us; it has helped us a lot.

Tenemos derecho a hablar con un abogado y nos dan 30 minutos para hablar con ellos. Es algo sorprendente y gracias a Dios que es así porque en otros lados nos cobran y ellos no nos cobran a platicar o hablar con un abogado. Media hora es gratuito, entonces nos ayuda, nos ha ayudado bastante.

– MARTIN NUNEZ

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“ One feels more empowered because, well, at least you know you can contest.

Se siente uno más empoderado porque pues por lo menos sé lo que yo le puedo contestar.

– MARTIN NUNEZ

The displacement avoidance programming benefited Nunez beyond the legal advice. His knowledge of public policy on rental issues in South LA has empowered him to exercise his rights and demystified the processes around making complaints. He is now able to confront his landlord to remedy lease disputes and address conditions within the unit.

Nunez continues to attend other displacement workshops, and he has been encouraging others to attend SAJE events for support on similar lease challenges.

With respect to the future of his salon, Nunez wants to use the space for the betterment of his community. He hopes to see his business grow and uplift the community by providing local employment opportunities and creating a place to come together to support each other.

“ [My goal is] to have a business where there can be employees ... and to share with other businesses and neighbors that we aren't alone, [there are resources to help businesses].

[Mi meta es] tener un negocio donde personas trabajen ... y compartir en los negocios y a los vecinos que no estamos solos [existen recursos para ayudar a las empresas].

– MARTIN NUNEZ



Community members use active transportation, like bikes, while participating in Ciclavía through parts of South LA 2024
Credit: Ciclavía, Kristian Ranker

EDGAR ESTRADA has lived in Los Angeles all of his life. He lived in Compton and Inglewood before he moved to South LA in 2009 with his wife and young son. They wanted to be closer to his extended family.

Estrada claimed his landlord retaliated against him by initiating an eviction process because he requested safe passage through construction work that was taking place in and around his unit. His housing situation became more complicated as he tried to keep his family safe from further retaliation and eviction, but he found the complicated legal procedures overwhelming. This pushed him to seek legal advice to stabilize his foothold in the community, which is important to him.

“Most of the apartments that we tend to see they’re up to like \$2,000 [per month to rent]. It’s almost out of our reach, and the cheapest ones are all the way [in] Long Beach. I’m not used to that distance because I have most of my family here, and when I need a babysitter or something, or I have an emergency, they [can] take care of my son.”

– EDGAR ESTRADA

Estrada learned of SAJE through his son’s pediatrician when discussing their housing instability. When he learned of the organization’s legal support for residents facing harassment and displacement, he was pleased to find that he could obtain free advice from a housing attorney.

The legal education workshops and advice enabled Estrada to navigate court appearances and seek a remedy for the unjust housing practices he feels his family has endured. Being referred to SAJE was a significant turning

point for Estrada and his family. They had been struggling to find affordable legal consultation and had resigned themselves to move out due to pressure from the landlord.

“Honestly, I was just looking for hope. I was just looking for something positive out of the legal clinic ... [SAJE] literally [lifted] a big weight that I had on my shoulders, just unloaded it because of the advice they were giving me.”

– EDGAR ESTRADA

South LA Eco-Lab’s Displacement Avoidance Plan is intended to address housing predicaments like Estrada’s. Before connecting with SAJE, Estrada and his wife were unaware of housing policies like rent control or anti-harassment policies. SAJE also informed Estrada that his home may not be a legal rental unit under the current housing code. This was helpful information in Estrada’s legal defense against an eviction process. Separately, this discovery provided Estrada with evidence to support a small-claims dispute against his landlord for the habitability concerns at the property.

“If we do get a settlement from a small claims court, we’re planning on buying land or something so we won’t have this problem anymore.”

– EDGAR ESTRADA

With newfound literacy in legal protections for tenants, Estrada and his wife plan to stay in their unit for the foreseeable future. However, depending on the outcome of the lawsuit, they may use the money toward their goal of buying their own place.