

People You Should Know  
Employee Interviews by Azalea Mejia



Yvonne Figueroa

*I am honored to have interviewed Yvonne Figueroa for the Latino Advisory Council Noticias newsletter before she retires. She was one of the few individuals that voluntarily took me under her wing and showed me the path, the structure, the importance of documentation and policy and procedures when working in daycare licensing. As I interviewed Yvonne I felt the passion and commitment that she has for the work that she does for families. Her conversation was detailed as she shared different experiences that she draws from and examples of helping others. I am truly blessed by knowing such a strong, powerful, and influential Latina and wish her much success in her future endeavors.*

*Hello Yvonne, tell us about yourself?*

Hello, my name is Yvonne Figueroa and I have been with the dept 35 years of those 35 years 22.5 was with DCP with the same team. I have a Bachelor of Science degree with a specialty in psychology from DePaul University, and I was born and raised in Chicago although both of my parents are from Puerto Rico. The last 12 ½ years I have been a Day Care Licensing Representative. One of the things I love about working in licensing is the privilege to work with different day care home providers. Many of them also desire to make an impact on society by working with one child and family at a time.

*How long have you been in Child Welfare and why did you decide to have a career in child welfare?*

I've been in child welfare for 35 years, I initially started with DHS as an intake worker in October 26, 1981. My first interest was psychology because I wanted to start by helping my family, that is how the interest starts sometimes. My plans shifted and priorities changed after I had my daughter and son. Another one of my motivations that led me into this career was my mother who she always had a passion for helping others in need. My mother only had a second-grade education but that didn't stop her from being a community activist and helping others in need. During the blizzard of 1967, I was awakened by the voices of strangers in my home and to the aroma of coffee and hot chocolate. My mother had brought in all those stranded outside into our home. They were drinking coffee and hot chocolate and she had set out a plate of crackers and cheese for them to eat. She had a heart of gold; I am blessed to have inherited a little bit of her and I enjoy being part of the solution and not the problem.

*What do you believe the challenges are when it comes to child welfare?*

My passion has always been child protection and one of the challenges that I encountered was that I had to be a jack of all trades and a master of none. You are expected to handle numerous unique scenarios when working with families. Additionally, by being bilingual I felt overworked much of the time. You are always being asked to help your coworkers regardless of your caseload size. Another major challenge was the lack of services in Spanish. Clients need services in their primary language. One of the things that helped me to survive in child protection was supportive supervisors that understood the importance of the front-line workers having worked the front-line themselves. In my 22 years of child protection service I only had six supervisors, so the retention of a supportive supervisor is very important for the worker. These supervisors and were appreciative and empathetic. In addition to supportive supervisors, both in DCP and in Licensing, I had the honor of having great coworkers. I could not have done either job without them as well.

*Are there any key moments in your career? What are your best memories?*

I had many key moments in my DCFS journey in child protection and licensing and it's hard to pick one. I need to summarize without giving much details of key moments but take this with you, there might be injustices that happen when it comes to the processes of the work we do, but remember God's Justice comes in due time. You must stand your ground and remember who you are. In the beginning of my DCFS career every team had objectives that were supposed to be met in a certain timeframe. We were almost always one of the top teams. Our Supervisor, Victor Flores would show his appreciation by treating the team to food in a social environment. He recognized and appreciated how committed the team was and encouraged us to continue to do the work.

*Any helpful advice for staff?*

Documentation is everything and should be done all the time, remember if it's not documented it didn't happen. Every conversation when it comes to the work with family's needs to be documented because at the end of the day when there is case is taken to court someone will be held accountable for what was done or not done. The passion of helping families has to be there in the child welfare field, regardless of the tragic cases that you come across.

*Do you have any words of wisdom that you would like to share with new employees coming into the department?*

I've noticed that people come in to the department wanting to change the world, but it starts with one child and one family at a time. Newer staff might come with passion book knowledge but when you are out in the field which is the real world out there, it is completely different. One of the things that I would recommend for new workers is to be culturally sensitive and understand that not everyone comes from the same background. Therefore, we have to become aware of the family's culture and we cannot impose on them what we think is right. We have a responsibility to show compassion and understanding and to look at every family with a fresh set of eyes, not a pre-conceived idea based on what the report says. We simply can't take a cookie cutter approach when working with families, we have to consider the family's background, their culture, upbringing, and what their norms are and go from there.

*Do you have a favorite Quote?*

Yes, Philippians 4:13, "I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength." This is one of my favorite bible quotes because in my 35 years of service I have overcome the challenges faced in the child welfare field through Him.

*What are your plans after you retire?*

I want to travel and be more involved in the ministry and do mission trips outside of the US while showing the love of Christ. I also want to be more involved in community activism to expose the injustices that happen to the Latino community.

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Milagros (Millie) Rodriguez

*Interviewing Millie Rodriguez was a bitter sweet moment for me because when I first started with the contracts department she was one of the few people who voluntarily took me under her wing. She showed me step by step when it came down to systems and coding. I value her as a strong, dedicated Latina with strong work ethics and appreciate her guidance and support. I wish her much success in her future endeavors.*

*Tell us about yourself, how many long have you been part of DCFS?*

My name is Milagros Rodriguez and I have been working for DCFS since October 1981, I was initially hired as a clerk III and started in an administrative unit of child protection. I have worked in follow up services, licensing administrative services, contracts and grants and finally the business unit, my role at DCFS has been to be of support to others and to child welfare workers in every way possible through the work I do. I was born and raised in in the Pilsen area of Chicago and earned my GED and a secretarial certificate from the Spanish Coalition for Jobs.

*What are the challenges that you face?*

The challenges that I have face along with other support staff is that although support is the backbone of most units or teams, we are not always supported, nor our opinion is not taken into consideration

when changes are made. Sometimes it feels like we support staff are looked down upon because we are just "clericals."

*Are there any key moments in your career?*

Yes, in the beginning of my career, the ambiance in the working field felt more united, family oriented, it almost felt like a second family.

*What are your plans when you retire?*

I will be spending time with my family, cooking and baking which are things that I enjoy but also my family enjoys my cooking.

*Do you have any words of wisdom that you would like to share with new employees coming into the department?*

Don't assume you know the answer, we are always learning.