

# Noticias

A publication of the DCFS  
Latino Advisory Committee

Pat Quinn, Governor  
Richard H. Calica, Director

Winter Edition, 2013

## Memories of the 23rd Annual Latino Family Institute



# Welcome from the Chairperson

Carmen Alvarez

As the new Chairperson of the Latino Advisory Committee (LAC), first and foremost, I want to express my appreciation to the members of LAC for entrusting me with this role. We are facing difficult economic times at DCFS and in the state of Illinois. As we face these arduous times we must continue to work for the common good of our families and children and rely on the strength of our culture and collective vision to weather the storm.



How can we confront these adversities? First, we need to remind ourselves that the mission statement of LAC was developed as an expression of our shared communal responsibility toward the welfare of our children, families and bilingual/Latino employees. The creation of this committee came as a result of a resolution by bilingual staff, community leaders and the Director's office about the need to work together in finding solutions affecting the delivery of child welfare services to our communities. Second, we need to understand that promoting the individual's well being remains one of our guiding

principles toward what we do on behalf of Latino families and our communities. As we meet these adversities, we need to acknowledge that language barriers remain one of the major obstacles for many of the families the agency serves.

LAC can only continue its mission with your support and collaboration. In order to meet this mandate, we continue to serve as an advisory committee to the Director. We have already met with Director Calica to highlight important issues such as continuation of our annual Institute Day, caseload size disparities with bilingual workers, appropriate allocation of bilingual staff and activities to mentor our Latino youth.

I would like to also emphasize the importance of our various subcommittees and some of the activities they have been involved with this year. The Employee Subcommittee continues to promote annual networking events such as Octavitas and a summer family picnic event at Fish Lake in Volo, Illinois. On a more serious note, this committee is also responsible for presenting data on the disproportional size of bilingual caseloads vs. monolingual caseloads in order to advocate for equitable caseload distribution among staff.

In recognizing the need to empower our youth and to help them become independent, the Youth Sub-Committee is taking a more serious approach to identifying the needs of our youth. Two milestone

activities were carried out this year. The first activity was a cooking demonstration of Latino cuisine. This activity benefited about 30 youth in attendance at the Harbor. The subcommittee also sponsored a tour of a group of young Latinos to the National Museum of Mexican Art in Pilsen, followed by a traditional Mexican meal at a local restaurant.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the newsletter subcommittee for their excellent dedication and commitment to continuing the publication of the Noticias newsletter. My plea to you is to get involved in our subcommittees and you are always welcome to provide your suggestions and feedback in improving the work we do for our families and employees. Unity, networking and collaboration will be the cornerstone of our mission.

In closing, I want to share a quote that impacts my belief system and serves as an approach to how social services are to be performed:

*"Somehow I learned that I belonged with my people, and that I had a responsibility to contribute to them. I will participate in changing the situations of injustice and inequality that I encounter because they deny people their rights and destroy their potential."*

*Dr. Antonia Pantoja.*

Gracias,  
Carmen Alvarez, Chairperson  
Latino Advisory Committee



## Executive Committee

Carmen M. Alvarez, Chairperson  
Rachel Roman, Chair-Elect  
Beatriz Ramirez, Scribe  
Luis Carrion, Past Chair

## Members

Damaris Acevedo  
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Maria Calderón  
Luís F. Carrión  
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Jennifer Contreras  
Sylvia Fonseca  
Jose' Javier Lopez  
Jose' A. Medina  
Miriam D. Mojica  
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Melina Pantoja  
Beatriz Ramirez  
Rachel Román  
Lourdes Rodriguez  
Nancy Rodriguez  
Glorymar Vazquez  
Rebecca Villagomez-Crnovich  
Rubi Viveros

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## The focus is on you: Rachel Román, Foster Care Case Manager The Children's Place Association

In every issue of Noticias we focus on a different Spanish-speaking bilingual employee. In this issue we would like to introduce The Children's Place Association foster care case manager Rachel Román.

### Where are you from?

Chicago. I was born and raised on the north side of Chicago, but as an adult I have lived on the south side. I still have yet to pledge my allegiance, *per se*, to one particular Chicago baseball team. Some may say I cop out when I tell them, "I'm a Chicago fan." It is what it is.

### What are your school degree(s)?

I graduated with Honors from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign with a major in Psychology and a minor in Latino Studies. I then received my master's degree from the University of Chicago's School of Social Service Administration.

### How long have you been in child welfare?

I have been in child welfare for seven years.

### Why did you become a child welfare worker?

I have enjoyed working with children since I was a teenager. Naturally, I wanted to become a teacher as it was the only profession I had known of that worked with children on a daily basis. As I became older, I realized the other career options available to me and chose to go into social work. Seeing as how social work is such a big category, I was able to hone in on a career in child welfare through my wonderful experience at a crisis nursery and now in my role as a case manager.

### Describe some challenges you face:

*Sometimes I find myself struggling to convey that Latinos do not fit neatly into one category. To understand that some Latinos do indeed have blonde hair and blue eyes as others have fair skin tones is just unfathomable to some. Not all Latinos speak Spanish and not all Latinos are Catholic or Christian or even Democrats for that matter. Tortillas are not a staple to all Latino meals. Can you believe that some Latinos can track their family back to the 1500s living in what is now known as the present day United States of America, while some families arrived in the last decade? My point is that Latinos run across such a long and vast spectrum. Many people fail to realize or even acknowledge, even among Latinos, that Latinos are a heterogeneous group.*

### Do you have any helpful advice for staff?

*I am a strong advocate for setting boundaries between work life and personal life. It is definitely not easy and the boundaries sometimes blur, but it is so important to not take your work home with you. Create a ritual that helps you transition from your child welfare worker self to your role at home as the caretaker, nurturer, etc. I usually sit in my car and listen to my favorite song just one more time to help clear my head before I step inside my home.*

### What is your favorite quote?

*"One great, strong, unselfish soul in every community could actually redeem the world."*  
—Elbert Hubbard

## Little Beacons on the move: making strides against breast cancer

LAC's "Little Beacons" team was on the move again to raise money to help in the fight against breast cancer. On Saturday October 20, 2012 our team participated in the 20<sup>th</sup> Annual Making Strides Against Breast Cancer 5K walk. The day started off chilly but the weather turned out to be beautiful.

It is wonderful that despite all the turmoil we collectively have been going through with the threat of the possible layoffs, impasse with the union contract and various personal and financial struggles, we are still able to reach deep within ourselves to help with the fight against this deadly disease that has touched us all whether directly or indirectly.

We raised over \$600 this year and would like to thank all our friends, family and co-workers who gave so generously. We hope to triple our fundraising efforts for next year and would like to invite anyone who is interested in either being a walker on our team or donating to this worthy cause to contact Sylvia Fonseca, Team Captain, at 312-814-8600 or [Sylvia.Fonseca@illinois.gov](mailto:Sylvia.Fonseca@illinois.gov).



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## Erie Neighborhood House

Erie Neighborhood House, a family advocacy center, has served the Chicago immigrant community since their establishment in 1870 and has continuously developed new ways of reflecting the various minority groups it encounters. Recently Erie Neighborhood House has expanded its program size to four sites that sit across the Chicago area. One such site located in the Little Village community boasts a new program called “Proyecto Cuídate” at 4225 West 25<sup>th</sup> Street. You can find various services at this site including ESL (English as a Second Language) classes, ESL tutoring for adults, a women’s empowerment group, counseling and social work services, computer classes as well as a computer lab open to the public.

“Proyecto Cuídate” has also dedicated itself to teaming up with DCFS and other POS agencies to provide services to bilingual families in the form of two parenting skills groups: Adults and Children Together Against Violence (ACT) and Parents Raising Safe Kids. These parenting skills groups are based on an evidence-based curriculum focusing on acculturation issues, intergenerational conflicts, culture clashes within families and biculturalism. Families and agencies are also welcome to use visitation rooms for parents and siblings. For more information or to make a referral, please call 773-542-7617 and ask for a staff member from “Proyecto Cuídate.”

## Keeping up with economic reality: *How does a child welfare agency raise funds to sustain services?*

By Alex Claudio

Over a 114-year span, Arden Shore Child and Family Services has overcome endless obstacles and changes to serve children and families in need. The Lake County-based child welfare agency has expanded, contracted and relocated from Lake Bluff and North Chicago to Vernon Hills and Waukegan.

According to the agency’s most recent annual report, 96 percent of the at-risk families served remained together through the duration of services, and of these, 87 percent completed their service plan goals successfully. In 2011, eight out of every 10 clients were Latino.

Despite its longevity and track record of success, Arden Shore is facing the same fundraising challenges any nonprofit organization might face today.

“Since we’re a single-issue nonprofit, we have a somewhat different financial structure than multi-service agencies,” said Dora Maya, Ph.D. and President/CEO of Arden Shore, referring to social service organizations with multiple programs which can generate several streams of revenue. The organization reported \$4.3 million in operating revenues last year; nearly 80 percent comes from government funding.

Juan Calixto, a veteran development consultant and principal of Ideation First, suggests that agencies must continuously strengthen relationships with foundations and corporations as donors, in

the face of shrinking government budgets and cutbacks. It could be tougher for child welfare agencies, Calixto said, “because DCFS provides mandates on the type of services that can be provided and also dictates who can receive those services. This binds the agency to seeking private funding only for those programs sanctioned by DCFS.”

Calixto added that a strong, active board of directors and auxiliary councils can boost financial support and promote an agency’s mission among their personal networks. He also recommends aggressive prospect research—mining the lists of foundations to make solid non-profit/donor matches.

Special event fundraisers are also important for both revenue and image making; Arden Shores has organized outings to hockey’s Chicago Wolves and soccer’s Chicago Fire games this year. Their most productive event is a “Run for the Kids,” supported by the Arlington Park racetrack. Their annual “Evening of Elegance” gala dinner occurs in October. A well-known restaurant owner in Libertyville has offered to donate as well.

The agency’s \$1.8 million capital campaign, which includes a new location in Waukegan and programmatic expansion initiatives, could also attract new donors as a byproduct. By and large, as Maya noted, the agency still has to stay on the traditional path of proposal writing to secure grants and keep the century-old legacy alive.

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## Wendy's Wonderful Kids

Unadoptable is unacceptable. We have always believed that no child waiting to be adopted should be labeled unlovable, too old, too difficult or simply too much trouble.

Wendy's Wonderful Kids, a signature program of the Dave Thomas Foundation for adoption, supports individual adoption professionals in all 50 states and the District of Columbia to be proactive using a child-focused recruitment model targeted exclusively on finding homes for America's longest-waiting children: Children who were age 12 or older; children who had experienced multiple moves; children who needed to be adopted with their brothers or sisters; children for whom the system had already given up.

Here in Illinois Wendy's Wonderful Kids has two recruiters. The recruiters Glorymar Vazquez (DCFS) and Therese Thompson (ChildServ) work together with the Adoption Information Center of Illinois. Glorymar Vazquez has been a Wendy's Wonderful Kids recruiter for six years now, three of those years with DCFS. Children are referred to the program when an adoptive home is needed. The recruiters develop a relationship with the minors from the beginning of the process and remain with them until their adoption is finalized. They assist workers by educating the families and children about the adoption process through information and life books.

Both recruiters have been successful in locating homes with large sibling groups as well as hard-to-place chil-

dren. One of the many success stories is about a large sibling group of five children. Glorymar convinced the family who was only interested in adopting one or maybe two children to learn more about these minors. Facilitating visits between the family, birth mother and children, these kids were placed together in August of 2011 and have adjusted well. This family fell in love with the minors from the moment they met them and are looking forward to adopting all five of them.

Another story is about a 13-year-old girl who had many needs and experienced multiple moves. One family in particular was frightened and stated no to Glorymar, but she knew deep inside that this was the family for this minor. Glorymar never gave up and insisted that the family come out to meet the minor at a matching event and introduce them to her in an informal setting. From the moment they met the minor they wanted to know more. They began pre-placement visits and now live together.

Children served by the Wendy's Wonderful Kids program are 1.7 times more likely to be adopted than children served by "business as usual." Children with mental health disorders and children over 15 are 3 times more likely to be adopted than those not served by the program. The Wendy's Wonderful Kids program works because recruiters diligently search for adoptive families, establish one-on-one relationships with the children and thoughtfully prepare the children for adoption.

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## LAC Subcommittees – Join Us

By Sylvia Fonseca

We encourage you to become involved with Latino Advisory Committee (LAC) leadership. Your feedback and input is always welcome. We have the following subcommittees that could benefit from your participation. We hope to see or hear from you.

1. LAC Chairperson: Carmen Alvarez  
312-633-4059 or Carmen.Alvarez@illinois.gov
2. Workforce (DCFS/Private): Rebecca Crnovich  
312-633-3456 or Rebecca.Crnovich@illinois.gov
3. LAC Conference Planning Committee:  
Luis Carrion  
312-328-2670 or Luis.Carrion@illinois.gov

4. Resources: Beatriz Ramirez  
312-793-4529 or Beatriz.Ramirez@illinois.gov
5. Youth: Maria Calderon  
312-328-2413 or Maria.Calderon@illinois.gov
6. Private Sector/Latino Consortium: Rachel Román  
312-706-1837 or Rachel.Roman@illinois.gov
7. Noticias: Sylvia Fonseca  
312-814-8600 or Sylvia.Fonseca@illinois.gov

## LAC's summer activity

By Jose Alex Medina

I can close my eyes and still smell and see the grilled chicken, arroz con gandules, arrachera, stuffed banana peppers with queso fresco, guacamole, homemade salsa, grilled corn on the cob and many more Latino delicacies. I can see both familiar and new faces sitting around the picnic tables spread across the grass in front of Fish Lake in Volo, IL. A few arrived early, others arrived a bit later—"traffic" got in their way. Some chose to grill all day long as they picked and ate a little bit of this and a little bit of that. Others sat around a table and played on the beautifully crafted Puerto Rican domino table. And yet, others went on a hay ride while others preferred to go on pedal boats around the lake. We all ate, laughed and got to know one another a bit better.

What a great way to promote and enhance family values that go beyond la familia alone! We are a people with distinct and significant values, customs and traditions. This year's summer activity event at Fish Lake celebrated who we are as a people. As a result it became a success. The day was perfect, the food was great, the mood amicable, but above all, the company and camaraderie amongst DCFS and the private sector bilingual employees was priceless. LAC has purpose to promote and provide events and activities designed to build on our sense of connectedness and camaraderie. Please plan ahead to be part of this great experience for the summer of 2013. You won't regret it.

## Reflections

By Rachel Roman

Several weeks ago I closed my first case, one that I saw from start to finish. The little boy was able to reach permanency through KinGap with his grandmother. Feelings of sheer happiness flooded over me knowing that this little boy that I had first seen as a sickly baby in the hospital was now a healthy school-aged boy in the care of his *abuela*.

For me, these moments of seeing a case from its very beginning to its end do not happen very often or often enough. Nostalgia rises over me like no other when I start to think about all the young lives I have entered and left. Flashes rush me of every child that has been assigned to me as a case manager. From my days as a foster care case manager at LifeLink in 2006 to my time now at The Children's Place Association working with medically specialized cases, I think about the hands I have held and the meals I have shared with these young, resilient children that have touched my heart and never left my mind. I knew their story. I knew their birthdates. I knew their favorite colors. I had even come to know what made them smile and sadly what made them hurt. I knew them once. Now they are some of many memories I have stored in a special place in my mind.

I still think about them. I had one young man who loved to run. He could run like no other. It was a time where he was alone with his

thoughts and could escape all the uncertainty around him, not knowing if his mother would do all that she needed to do to get him back home or if he would stay in his foster home forever. He was very strong and brave. Now when I run, I think about him. I remember taking a little girl on a visit with her mother and watching the Michael Jackson movie for her birthday. Boy did she enjoy the movie! She was awed by all the choreography and every spectacle the movie had to offer. Now each time I hear a Michael Jackson song, I think of her.

Whether I have had to transfer out a case or have my caseload reconfigured, I still remember their names. I still wonder what they look like, how well they are doing in school and if someone loves them the way they need to be loved.

I still keep in touch with some families and love getting good news about how well my former child clients are doing. How tall they have grown or how they made the Honor Roll at school. It is very comforting, to say the least, and helps put me at ease knowing they are doing just fine. My hopes are that with every case I've received, I helped make these young lives better and that they are truly better when we said our goodbyes. Regardless, they will always carry a special place in my heart and I will forever remember the wonderful moments shared.

***The mission of the Latino Advisory Committee (LAC) is to advise and make recommendations to the Director concerning the Department's servicing of Latino clients and of any concern involving Latino personnel.***

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## Youth Cultural Dinner

The Latino Advisory Committee's Youth Subcommittee hosted a Youth Cultural Dinner at The Harbour's community center in Des Plaines, IL. Emily Edelman from The Harbour was very supportive in allowing the committee to host the event here. There were about 30 youths who attended from both DCFS and the community.

LAC Youth Subcommittee members Maria Calderon, Carmen Alvarez, Ruby Viveros, Glorymar Vazquez and Jennifer Contreras worked hands on with the youth to prepare dinner. Carmen and Maria showed the girls how to cut the vegetables properly without getting hurt. Jennifer and Ruby showed the girls how to boil the chicken and season it to perfection. While some of the girls were cooking, other youths were decorating the dining room with festive streamers, balloons and

tablecloths. Once the chicken was cooked, Glorymar showed the girls how to shred the chicken and discard the bones. Jennifer and Maria helped the girls add the chipotle sauce and onions to complete the final recipe of tinga. Carmen pre-made the Mexican rice and beans and described to the youths how it should be prepared and cooked.

Once all the guests arrived, the committee members introduced themselves and described the goals and objectives of the Youth Subcommittee. The members also explained the purpose of hosting a cultural dinner. The committee members also asked the youths to introduce themselves and what was a Hispanic meal that they had eaten in the past. After introductions, the committee members and staff helped serve the tostadas de tinga with Mexican rice and beans. After dinner, everyone helped

clean up and the committee members provided the youths with a cultural cookbook.

The youth gained knowledge on how to prepare a nutritious meal with a limited budget. They were also able to maintain and promote their cultural ties and bond with the other participants.

The youths have stated they would like to participate in another cultural dinner activity to learn how to make other dishes such as Puerto Rican meals. The Youth Subcommittee was excited to host their first Youth Cultural Dinner and intends to host other events for the youths. If you know of a Latina youth who could benefit from a future activity, feel free to contact subcommittee chairperson Maria Calderon at 312-328-2413 or [Maria.Calderon@illinois.gov](mailto:Maria.Calderon@illinois.gov).

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## Trip to the National Museum of Mexican Art in Chicago

The Latino Advisory Committee's Youth Subcommittee organized a trip to the National Museum of Mexican Art for DCFS and POS Latino youths this past July. A personal tour guide was assigned to the group and the "Mexicalidad" exhibition was presented as a one-hour tour. A total of six females and one male attended.

For this activity, the Youth Subcommittee intended to expose the youths to their culture. Part of the exhibit consists of Mexican origins and history and it ends with how Latinos have migrated to the U.S. The exhibit addresses how Latinos have brought and continue to bring their culture across borders and how they continue to express their culture through their language and art. After the museum trip, the group ate lunch at a local Mexican restaurant.

At the end of the event, the group completed an evalu-

ation to get an idea about their experience and what other events they would be interested in attending in the future. The majority of the group wants more visits to Latino museums, they want to participate in Latino parades and they want to be provided with different workshops. When they were asked about this event at the museum they were honest and responded how they were hesitant about going to the museum, but that the tour representative engaged them in conversation and made their museum experience enjoyable.

If you know of a youth that may be interested in participating in future events, contact Youth Subcommittee chairperson Maria Calderon at 312-328-2413 or [Maria.Calderon@illinois.gov](mailto:Maria.Calderon@illinois.gov).

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual “Yo Lo Hice: You Can Too” Latino youth career day

By Sylvia Fonseca

The first attempt to organize a Latino Youth Career Day to help keep our youth excited about education and staying in school had such a positive response from the students that participated that we decided to do it again. The Latino Consortium led the effort along with Junior Achievement, Northeastern University, Division of Service Intervention and a few Latino Advisory Committee (LAC) members.

This year the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual “Yo Lo Hice, You Can Too” Latino Youth Career Day event was held at the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago on Friday, March 23, 2012. The Federal Reserve stepped up to the plate and provided the venue, breakfast and lunch to the participants. The Federal Reserve also had over 15 volunteers from their Latino Resource Association (LRA). Over 100 youth were invited. Chicago area high schools with large Latino student populations were targeted such as Juarez, Solorio and Schurz.

Cynthia Castillo, Budget Manager of the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago, gave the students a welcome address and a Federal Reserve Bank overview presentation. Mike Oquendo of Mikey O Productions served as MC and included himself in the speed networking activity. The Keynote Speaker, Robert J. Renteria, is a successful businessman turned author of “From the Barrio to the Board Room” and “Mi Barrio.” Renteria is using his books with youth across America in hopes of replacing violence, delinquency, gangs and drugs with education, pride, accomplishment and self-esteem. Each participant

received a copy of his book and a book bag. His inspiring message to them is anything is possible if you work hard and stay focused on your dream.

Over 25 Latino professionals representing various occupations in conjunction with academic institutions and organizations working with Latino youth engaged in one-on-one conversations about their professions and participated in interactive information sessions with the students for fifteen minutes intervals before the students moved to the next table where another professional was seated.

Rosa Zamora, Regional Partnership Manager at New Futuro LLC, presented during the students lunch. New Futuro is a student resource for college admission and beyond. The program offers information on researching colleges, filling out financial aid applications, tracking scholarships tailored for students of Latino descent, exploring college majors and career options, creating a 10-step plan to ensure college admission and a section on how parents can support their children’s success.

The students also participated in two workshops: “Sense of Purpose—Junior Achievement Careers with a Purpose” and “Mirror, Mirror—Junior Achievement Economics for Success.” The event ended with a tour of the Money Museum. Based on the event’s success, the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago asked permission to duplicate the program for African American High School students.



Noticias is brought to you by the Latino Advisory Committee and the Illinois

Department of Children and Family Services. It is distributed to DCFS employees, POS agencies, and agencies affiliated with DCFS. The newsletter includes articles pertinent to child welfare, Latino welfare issues, and DCFS/POS programs, and strives to be an informative source for staff by providing updates on new child welfare initiatives as well as upcoming events.

It is our hope to continue providing staff with a vehicle for the sharing of information. In this endeavor, we are looking for your input, submission of articles, and suggestions for improving Noticias. Articles related to your experiences with families and personal stories are also greatly appreciated. Please submit articles, information about upcoming events, or news to:

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