



JB Pritzker, Governor
Marc D. Smith, Acting Director

November, 2020

Celebrating the 31st Annual LAC Institute Day at NEIU



October 2019, Latino Advisory Council members and participants (left to right) back row: Yeni Rojas, Miriam Mojica, Daniel Fitzgerald, Juanita Calderón, Sidney Juarez, Sylvia Fonseca, Taylor Pierson, Azalea Mejia, José J. López, Evelyn Martinez, front row: Dr. Mercedes Martinez, Julia Monzón, Rosamaria Molina LaSalle, Nancy Rodríguez and Alex Medina

WELCOME TO NOTICIAS.



My name is Nancy Rodríguez, Chair-person for the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, Latino Advisory Council. The year 2020 has been very challenging for children and their families, especially due to the COVID pandemic, issues of disproportionality, poverty, lack of resources, and lack of opportunities and access to healthcare for people of color. These challenges have led to increased rates in mental health, substance abuse, domestic violence, and health issues, placing our children and other vulnerable populations at higher risk of harm. More than ever, social services are needed to help children and their families thrive. Through social services and adequate resources and opportunities for all, children and their families will be able to move forward with improved positive outcomes.

Our current situation connects people virtually for our own safety and health. In the future, we will be able to unite in person to network, share information, empower, and learn.

Best Regards,

Nancy Rodríguez,
Latino Advisory Council Chair

Sergio Valente: Worker of the year 2019

By Evelyn Martinez

The LAC DCFS Worker of the Year Award for 2019 went to Sergio Valente, MSW. He is a bilingual child protection advanced specialist in DuPage County for DCFS. He has worked for the Department 15 years. He is an exemplary person who values striving for excellence. He is deeply committed to doing a very good job and ensuring children are safe everywhere he visits. He interviews children in a way to make them comfortable so they can share sometimes very traumatic events they have never shared with anyone else. An example of this was when this past year he was interviewing a child about something unrelated to sexual abuse and just because he explored the issue of safety and feeling safe and unsafe, or unsafe, the child was able to reveal sexual abuse by someone close to her family. This child had never revealed this to anyone prior to speaking with Sergio. The case was later investigated by the police and the family was able to put in protective measures to assure their children's safety.

Sergio often explains in supervision how he counsels parents about the effects of using corporal punishment, how it can be counterproductive and



Sergio Valente with his son Nicholas and wife Lisa.

more mentally harmful to children that have special needs. It is not unusual for parents to cry while acknowledging their mistakes to him during their interviews. Sergio really cares and goes beyond the basics of what is expected of any investigator on a case of child abuse or neglect. He has compiled his own list of resources and shares them with all the families he meets so that they are aware and can access help in the absence of DCFS in their lives.

Sergio goes out of his way to assure families are reunited when a safety plan has terminated. He has been known to take extra measures and work outside of regular working hours to assure children could be reunited with their parents more quickly when a safety plan was terminated.

When it comes to his documentation, no one compares. He is detailed, organized

and very careful about what he collects so that it is all part of his evaluation of a family. He uses this information to improve his understanding of where they come from and why they may believe what they do so he can counsel and advise the family on improving upon their strengths. He is very cognizant of managing his caseload and always tries to complete cases as quickly as he can. In team meetings, he is helpful and shares resources or suggestions for helping others improve their work or just helping them out. Sergio is a valuable asset to not only his team but to the whole office. He is often asked to supervise as a temporary assignment when supervisors are called away for mandatory meetings or trainings away from the office. He does so willingly and professionally. I have never heard him complain. He is a very good leader.

Sergio is held in very high regard by his colleagues, not just in our office but by many others who know him outside of this office as he used to work in Joliet. He is an outstanding Latino professional who truly cares about the children and families we serve. I am proud to have him on our DuPage County team and confidently depend upon him when duty calls.



LAC MEMBERSHIP

Officers:

Chairperson
Nancy Rodríguez
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Cynthia Valentín

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José Javier López
Office of Latino Services

Director's Liason:

Daniel Fitzgerald
Chief of Affirmative Action

Committees:

Child Safety & Permanency
Community Risk Reduction & Staffing
Data Validity & Disproportionality
Strategic Communications
POS Committee
Latino Family Institute
Professional Development Day

Contact Julia Monzón at
julia.monzon@illinois.gov
if interested in becoming a member.

COVID-19: Know the Difference

IS IT A **COLD** OR **FLU** OR **COVID-19**?



SIGNS & SYMPTOMS	COLD	FLU	COVID-19
Symptom Onset	Gradual	2 Days	2-14 Days
Body Aches	Slight	Common	Common
Cough	Common	Common	Common
Diarrhea	Rare	Sometimes	Sometimes
Fatigue/Weakness	Sometimes	Common	Common
Fever/Chills/Shaking	Rare	Common	Common
Loss of Taste or Smell	Never	Never	Sometimes
Shortness of Breath or Difficulty Breathing	Rare	Common	Common
Stuffy Nose	Common	Common	Rare
Sneezing	Common	Sometimes	Rare
Sore Throat	Common	Common	Common
Headache	Rare	Common	Common

QUESTIONS?

Call **1.800.889.3931** • Email dph.sick@illinois.gov • Website www.dph.illinois.gov

Source: Illinois Department of Public Health

March on Washington: A youth's point of view

By Makaila Mitchell-Evans

I am a 14-year-old girl who was given the opportunity to accompany my grandmother, Trella Wade-Mitchell to Washington DC with the agency she works for, National Youth Advocate Program. While enduring and living in this pandemic that this country is faced with is hard enough, to deal with racism and inequality is very sad.

I am a young girl who is growing up in a world filled with so much hate for each other. I do understand that we as a people need to stop the racism. It is on us, the people, to give justice and equality to all. This was a very heartfelt and educational moment in my life. As I said before, I am very dispirited by this.

I did not know what to expect. This march was a historical moment in my life that I will never forget. I was able to see

people from all races and nationalities that came together to stand against racism, injustice and inequality. We walked two miles and chanted the whole time until we reached the park. The park was filled and several speakers spoke. I cried when I heard of so much death and how the people died. We ended the march at Martin Luther King Memorial.



Trella and Makaila



Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial, Washington, D.C.

2019 LAC Institute Day Gallery



DCFS Acting Director Marc D. Smith



Keynote Speaker Dr. Xavier Perez, Criminology Head, DePaul University

People You Should Know

MILAGROS (MILLIE) RODRIGUEZ



By Azalea Mejia

Interviewing Millie Rodriguez was a bittersweet moment for me because she will be retiring this year after 39 years of service. 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?

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.

2019 LAC Institute Day Gallery (cont)



Dr. Xavier Perez with Celmira Bolanos-Ayala 2018 DCFS Worker of the Year



(left to right) Jennifer Contreras, Awards Chair; Alejandra Gallejos, POS Foster Parent of the Year and grandson Vincent Figueroa POS Youth of the Year

Celebrating Our Afro-Caribbean Roots

By Julia Monzón

As many of you know, the Caribbean is a melting pot of diverse ancestry from all over Europe, Africa, Spain and the Netherlands. This is a result of old trade routes including slave trade routes to the new world. My own family consists of dark complexions, the fair and everything in between. Hair ranging from black, to the lightest blond, straight, curly and coarse. I have cousins with freckles! Maybe this is someone you haven't heard of before.

Reaching back to around 1492 you most likely know the story of Christopher Columbus, but how many people have heard of the



The Niño Brothers Monument in Andalusia, Spain

Niño brothers? The Niño family were Africans who lived in Spain. Pedro, Alonso, Francisco and Juan. The brothers became a famous seafaring family and traveled with Christopher Columbus on his maiden voyage to the new world and on

subsequent expeditions. They made numerous voyages exploring the new world and the West Indies with other famous explorers such as Pedro Fernandez Coronel and the Pinzón brothers. It is believed that Juan Niño was the owner and master of the Niña. Pedro served on Santa Maria and Francisco who was the youngest at the time was believed to have served as a cabin boy on the Niña but on a subsequent voyage was the pilot of the ship. Francisco settled in the Honduras and was mayor of his town when he died. The brothers passed down their seafaring legacy to their sons who continued the family tradition.

2019 LAC Institute Day Gallery (cont)



Alex Medina, winner of the Celeste Peña Award accompanied by Liliana Raygoza, community activist (left) and Dr. Beatriz Medina



Megan Brand POS Worker of the Year, Arden Shore (center) with Monica Badiano and Mark Dybas



Carlos Wong, DCFS Support Staff of the Year with Jennifer Contreras, Awards Chair



Najma M. Adam, Ph D, LCSW Clinical Services teaches "Cutting Through Taboos: What you need to know about sexually problematic behavior to help your clients"

People You Should Know

YVONNE FIGUEROA



By Azalea Mejia

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. As I interviewed Yvonne I felt the passion and commitment that she has for the work that she does for families! 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.

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. I've always wanted to help my family and other, my mother has inspired me in this.

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.



1967 Chicago Blizzard, source: Chicago Tribune

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.

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.

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

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 must 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.

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.

Please visit the LAC page on the DCFS website to read the full interview.

<https://www2.illinois.gov/dcfs/aboutus/policy/Pages/Noticias.aspx>

Service Milestones

Congratulations

5 YEARS OF SERVICE

- Lidia Davila, Harvey
- Susana Olivas, Galesburg
- Dulce Patron, Glen Ellyn
- Lorena Sánchez-Serrato, Harvey
- Rosalva Acevedo, Chicago
- Yadira Mazon, Chicago
- Laura Hernández, Rockford
- Roberto Hernández, Glen Ellyn

10 YEARS OF SERVICE

- Karina Arteaga, Aurora
- Marielisa Jackson, Aurora
- Monica Sosa, Chicago

15 YEARS OF SERVICE

- José López, Chicago
- Beatriz Ramírez, Chicago
- Claudia Ramos, Aurora

20 YEARS OF SERVICE

- Jessica Furio, Glen Ellyn
- Cecilio Pérez, Springfield
- Cesario López, Chicago
- Gloria Navarro, Aurora
- Larissa Rico, Aurora
- Desiree Silva, Bloomington
- Andrew Martínez, Chicago

25 YEARS OF SERVICE

- Julia Ramírez, Springfield
- Celia Valle, Aurora
- Jeanette Camarillo, Deerfield
- Ana González, Chicago

35 YEARS OF SERVICE

- Ana Campos, Chicago

RETIRING AFTER 39 YEARS OF SERVICE

- Milagros Rodríguez, Chicago

MSW DEGREE

- Lisa Bonilla, April 2020



Parade of Flags, 2019



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NOTICIAS is brought to you by the Latino Advisory Council 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. A major part of this endeavor is you! We are asking 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 incoming events or news to: Julia Camacho Monzón, Strategic Communications Committee Chair julia.monzon@illinois.gov
1911 S. Indiana Ave. Chicago, IL 60616

Or to any of the Strategic Communication Committee members:

Julia Camacho Monzón, Editor, Chair;
José J. López, Final Editor; Vanessa Castro, Former Scribe and Contributing Writer; Azalea Mejia, Scribe; Jennifer Contreras, Contributing Writer; Nancy Rodríguez, LAC Chair-Elect; Evelyn Martínez, Contributing Writer

If you would like more information or would like to participate in one of the LAC subcommittees, please contact Nancy Rodriguez, LAC Chair at nancy.rodriguez@illinois.gov or any LAC member.

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