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Latino Advisory Committee



Welcome from the Chairperson

Claudia S. Ramirez

As I begin this new journey as the Chairperson of the Latino Advisory Committee (LAC), I would like to give you my most sincere welcome to this edition of Noticias. I look forward to a year filled with accomplishments.

For the past several years, the LAC members have been addressing and advocating for a number of issues affecting the child welfare system and therefore our Latino families and workers. The issues range from home of relative reform to the miscoding of some Latino families who have been involved with DCFS.

The DCFS Division of Quality Assurance, with the assistance of LAC members, is now working on a project aimed at correcting a number of deficiencies related to the way Latinos are coded in SACWIS and therefore counted. Our goal is to ensure our DCFS Latino families are fairly and properly represented and served. This project has strong roots in the fact that the Latino population in Illinois has increased in numbers as high as 338% in Kendall County and 142% in Will County. These numbers are documented in the latest census results. However, this growth does not appear to be reflected in the DCFS/POS system. We, as Latino workers, have the responsibility to take an active role in this process and ensure we do our part in an attempt to correct this.

I encourage everyone to have a clear view of the challenges that currently affect Latino workers and families in order to collectively make every effort to resolve them. Just as we have developed strategies and visualized the main stages on the way to our goal, we must continue to regard every achievement as a mere stepping-stone for the next advancement. The struggles continue, but we have to remain vigilant and true to our child welfare community. As Albert Einstein said, "In matters of truth and justice, there is no difference between large and small problems, for issues concerning the treatment of people are all the same."

Finally, I would like to extend an invitation to you to participate in the Institute Day Planning Committee. This committee meets every third Wednesday of the month at 1 p.m. For locations please feel free to contact me directly at Claudia.S.Ramirez@illinois.gov.

The Focus is on You:

Hilda Ramos, LCSW, Director, Latino Consortium

In every issue of Noticias we focus on a different Spanish-speaking bilingual employee. In this issue we would like to introduce Hilda Ramos of the Latino Consortium. If you know of someone we should highlight, please send an e-mail to Evelyn Martinez at Evelyn.Martinez@illinois.gov.

Where are you and your family from? I was born in Tijuana B.C. Mexico in 1969. Both my parents are from Michoacán, Mexico. My parents immigrated to the United States in the early 1970s to pursue the American dream. Their journey as immigrants began in Northern California working in the vineyards of wine country. We eventually made our way to Chicago and called Little Village home.

School degrees: I have a Bachelors and Masters in Social Work with a Minor in Psychology. I am a licensed clinical social worker.

How long have you been in child welfare? I began my social work career in 1997 providing counseling to Latino children and families and conducting parenting classes inside church basements and day care centers. A year later I went to work for the Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Behavioral Health program at Mount Sinai Hospital Medical Center. I was part of a grant that required me to provide individual and family therapy to children and adolescents from the Pilsen and Little Village neighborhoods of Chicago. Six years later I went to work for CAUSES Child Abuse Treatment Center as a clinical supervisor. I continued clinical work with Latinos in foster care at Alternative Behavioral Treatment Center (ABTC) and Access Com-

munity Health Network. It was at Access that I learned how the mind and body are connected in the life experience of clients. After moving to Washington, D.C. in 2009, I worked at Washington National Hospital—Outpatient Psychiatry & Behavioral Health as the Intake Director over the hospital's largest department. In 2010 my family and I moved back to Chicago.

Why did you become a child welfare worker? As long as I can remember I have always been a social worker. Even at a very young age and being the oldest of five siblings I found myself serving as a surrogate mother while my parents worked long hours in low-paying factory jobs. Being the oldest, I was held to a higher standard. Whether it was translating for my parents and extended family or attending court dates and government appointments, I was always advocating. Subsequently my career path of helping Latino children and families came from my own experiences of growing up in poverty and having witnessed my parents adapt to a new country that promised the American Dream but with many struggles.

What are some of the challenges you face? Being on the frontline as a clinical therapist for many years and coming into a more administrative role is forcing me to look at child welfare issues from more of a macro level. At the same time I welcome this challenge and I look forward to moving the Latino Consortium into a more influential role on behalf of our members and their clients.

One of the other concerns that motivates me in this new role is



Hilda Ramos

ensuring that our advocacy efforts will address the issues and needs of all Latino children and families in a linguistic and culturally competent manner. This is critical to ensure that services are appropriately matched with the needs of our families and that there is no space for misrepresentation.

Helpful advice for staff: Always remember that we are serving children and families and not systems. This is critical because often times it is easy to get caught up in secondary issues.

We must always remember our individual roles as well as our value to a team. This allows us to work at self-improvement but maintain the goal of working together and committing ourselves to a common goal.

Key moments in your career: One of my first clients at Mount Sinai was a teenage girl from Mexico who had been sold to a family in the United States to serve as their nanny and servant. This was discovered after a

Continued on Page 3

Ramos, con't.

teacher, curious about why the girl was not in school, made a hotline call. This young lady was placed in numerous foster homes and had no information about her own identity and family back in Mexico. While in treatment she received assistance from the foster care agency to find her family. Despite her traumatic experiences and abandonment, she had forgiven her parents, wanted to be loved by her foster family and wanted to be a successful Latina.

In another case I provided a safe environment for three young children to discuss who had sexually abused them because of my initiative to bring the family together in therapy. It had been assumed by almost everyone that the father was the abuser so the family had been separated for one year. I learned that even if the children are bilingual and placed individually with a monolingual therapist, this does not necessarily guarantee that the children could feel comfortable expressing themselves. It wasn't until these children had their mother present that the sessions were done in Spanish. It was this environment that provided a safe place for the family to discuss traumatic issues. Eventually the three children provided details of how a neighbor had access to the family's apartment and would sneak into their bedroom in the middle of the night while both parents slept. In the end, the father in this case was vindicated and the family was reunited.

Favorite quote: The best way out is always through (Robert Frost).

Hispanic Foster Parents of the Year:

By Sulma Garcia-Mora

Martha and Marcos Colon were awarded the recognition of DCFS Foster Parents of the Year at the Hispanic Family Institute in November 2010.

Martha and Marcos Colon currently have two children in their household, Mark whom they adopted and Kevin. The Colons have had both children in their home since they were younger than one-year-old; the boys are now age 5 and 6 respectively. The Colons are raising both children to be respectful and have tirelessly worked to instill the values and tradition of their Hispanic heritage that appear to be disappearing in today's society. These values and tradition include the love of family, the language of respect towards elders and the gift of sharing. Both children are fully bilingual and only speak Spanish in the home.

The gift of sharing is perhaps the one tradition that has been the easiest value to teach Mark and Kevin. That is because of the Colon's great ability to show compassion and love. For how else can one describe the decision to take in two infants who at the time had physical and emotional issues and to have the patience and courage to nurture, protect and



Marcos and Martha Colon and DCFS worker Sulma Garcia-Mora

provide for them. The Colons could have easily decided to spend their spare time traveling, picking up a hobby or just being a couple.

Both Martha and Marcos Colon are from Colombia. They live in an apartment on the Northwest side of Chicago. They are at an age when they should be planning to slow down and prepare for retirement. But instead Marcos works the third shift because it provides the best pay for this family and Martha travels almost two hours every weekday to go to work and to take Kevin and Mark to school in Pilsen. Blood ties could no more increase the natural dedication and love the Colons have for their adopted and foster sons. May they continue to have the fortitude to provide for their unique family unit.

Welcome New Hires!

Jose Avalos, Mario Camilo-Polanco, Lilia Canales, Rosa Frias, Sydnie Juarez, Norma Machay, Darcie Navarro, Claudia Ramos, Norma Renteria, and Theresa Reyes

If we missed anyone, let us know and they will be included in the next issue of Noticias.

Saludos y Bienvenidos!

Tribute to Luis Barrios

By D. Jean Ortega-Piron, DCFS Guardian

Back in June 1987, I began working with the Department of Children and Family Services. During my first day of work at DCFS a colleague walked me around the 6th floor of the James R. Thompson Center and introduced me to other DCFS staff that was working there. One of the first individuals I met was Luis Barrios, who was serving as the Burgos Coordinator. He impressed me as an individual with a commitment to and an understanding of the DCFS mission and particularly to the direction in which Latino Services needed to head. Over twenty-three years have passed since that day we met and I still feel that way about Luis.

During his years at DCFS his job position and duties evolved and included the following: monitoring service delivery to Latino clients to assure maximum utilization of resources and services; internal advocacy on behalf of Latino clients; serving as the linkage between the Latino Advisory Committee and the Director's Office; assisting in the development of the Department's implementation of the Burgos Strategic Plan for Services to Latinos and in particular the Spanish-speaking clients; monitoring the Department's recruitment and hiring of Latino as well as bilingual employees; assisting in the area of

public relations and media activities; influencing policy and rule making to ensure information was culturally sensitive and appropriate toward Latinos in Illinois; spearheading the Annual Latino Family Conference and the Latino Family Profile handbook; and overseeing/coordinating the development and activities of the Latino Consortium.

In 2002 he retired from DCFS and began consulting, eventually becoming the Executive Director of the Latino Consortium. During the past years, Luis's main focus has continued to be with the Latino children and families that we serve. As the Guardian for abused and neglected children in Illinois, I have worked closely with Luis on many of these issues and I believe our agency is privileged to have had Luis advocate on behalf of all of our children and families. He has since left his position as the Executive Director of the Latino Consortium to pursue other areas of work, and I have been asked to write a few words about Luis. As you can see, a few words cannot adequately express my appreciation for his work.

What I observed in Luis all of these years is that he is able to thoroughly analyze the minutest of details while describing and developing

the big picture work that is also needed in the child welfare services environment. I feel there is no limit to Luis's level of achievement. He will continue in his thorough, methodical manner to complete a task to the best of his ability and his ability is extremely high.

In speaking with Luis about his last few months as the Executive Director for the Latino Consortium, I think those months were ones of transition, reflection and learning to let go. It isn't easy to let go, but changes are inevitable in all our lives.

In closing, I would like to send my personal wishes and thoughts to Luis.

Dear friend,

I will miss the steadiness and expertise that you have provided us for so many years. We are richer for your years with us and poorer that you are leaving. I want to publicly extend my deep appreciation and admiration to you for the thoughtful, patient and extremely capable way in which you served the children, the families and us throughout the years.

*Affectionately,
Jeanie (aka "The Guardian")*



Save the Date!

DCFS 23rd Annual Latino Advisory Committee Family Institute Days

November 17 - 18, 2011

Wyndham Lisle-Chicago Hotel
Lisle, Illinois

Tribute to Luis Barrios

By Elizabeth Arroyo, Licensing Coordinator, Latino Consortium

I first met Luis Barrios when I worked at Association House of Chicago in 2003. While I worked with intact families, he worked with the Consortium, and our greetings were usually in passing as our job functions did not require much conversation. I met up with Luis again in 2006 or 2007—I can't remember the exact year—but this time I worked for a different organization and he was the interim director of the Latino Coalition for Prevention. He quickly recognized me at one of the Coalition meetings, greeted me and pinpointed where he had seen me and when. Needless to say, I was impressed. Although I recognized him, I could not put together where or when to save my life. It left me wondering what kind of impression I had made with him for him to remember me. It made me feel better. Regardless of the formality or informality of his contact with people, Luis remembers, leaving a lasting impression.

When a position for the Latino Consortium was posted in 2007, I jumped at the chance to work with Luis, who was then the Executive Director. I learned a great deal from him and he continues to amaze me. Not only at his ability to make first impressions last beyond memory, but at his passion and commitment to Latino families in the state of Illinois and beyond. He has worked diligently in ensuring that our Latino families are culturally understood, that they have a voice and that they count. He strongly believes that Latinos must be at the forefront of change and not regarded as an afterthought.

As with every social movement toward equality, there have been



Luis Barrios

barriers, hurdles and resistance along the way, and there will continue to be. Aware of this, Luis continues to move forward with the mentality that our jobs—ensuring safety and cohesion among Latino families—cannot risk errors. Paraphrasing his comment: if DHS makes an error, families will make due until services are reinstated. There are no long-term effects. However, an error by IDCFS will cause lasting trauma in the life of a child. This has been his motivation to continue to work towards equality for our Latino families regardless of erroneous perceived notions that his actions have led to roadblocks or have been oftentimes considered a nuisance. To the contrary, Luis' strong passion gives voice to Latino families that struggle with a complicated system as well as language and cultural barriers.

I have been honored to have had the opportunity to work with him, to learn from the wealth of information he has acquired over the years and hope that he continues to advocate for Latino families.



Executive Committee

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Emely Sanchez, Chair- Elect
Beatriz Ramirez, Scribe
Luis Carrion, Past Chair

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Carmen Alvarez
Carlos Argueta
Maria Calderon
Luis Carrion
Rebecca Crnovich
Sylvia Fonseca
Yanira Fontanez
Jose Lopez
Evelyn Martinez
Miriam Mojica
Frank Navarro
Sara Newton
Christine Nicpon
Beatriz Ramirez
Claudia S. Ramirez
Hilda Ramos
Lourdes Rodriguez
Nancy Rodriguez
Rachel Roman
Emely Sanchez
Glorymar Vazquez

DCFS Dekalb Supports Our Youth!

By Dahlia Roman, Child Welfare Specialist-Placement

As a Child Welfare Specialist Placement Worker working in a college town, I have been blessed to be working with our youth in college who attend Northern Illinois University (NIU) and Kishwaukee Community College. Our youth work diligently along with all those who have supported them through a successful high school graduation. Like many young people, they too, want to attend college and have the experiences that so many of us have had.

Through my experiences with these youths in college, I found that many are lonely, homesick, and lacking the “human support system”. These concerns are similar to what all youths experience when they leave home to attend college.

However, the experiences of our youth in care are exacerbated by factors that include lack of family support, lack of role models, and lack of stable housing to return to for holiday breaks and summer vacations. For some, the feeling of seclusion has led them to quit attending college. Furthermore, some have missed classes, which resulted in such consequences including being placed on “academic advisory” or “academic probation”.

About a year ago, I decided to do something about it. I recall having a similar discussion with one of our youth in care I’m responsible for. She expressed something that I had been thinking about without me mentioning it. This youth said, “Why can’t we (other foster children) know each other and help each other through this?”

Upon further discussions with other



youths in care attending college, they agreed that they would like to meet other youths in care. This led to the development of a youth in care support/network group. We decided to focus on youths in care who are attending Northern Illinois University or Kishwaukee Junior College. We named the support group “Meet and Greet”.

I brought the idea to my immediate supervisor Kathy Berry, Manager Marilyn Green, and the Regional Administration Deborah Palmer-Thomas. They agreed that the idea was great and provided me with support. Many of my colleagues at our local DeKalb Field Office also agreed to support the “meet and greet”.

I also found a great advocate for youth in care located in my office. Richard Echevarria, a former youth in care now working for DCFS helped ensure that whatever I needed, he would be there for the youth in care. Mr. Echevarria has been a constant blessing by being

present at almost the entire meet and greet. He has taken the initiative to find valuable items for the youth in care, including providing them with school supplies, quilts, and other material resources. He also talks with the youth, ensuring that their concerns are appropriately addressed. He has encouraged the youths to see him as a role model knowing that he was once in similar situation.

Seven youths participated in our first “meet and greet,” which included eating a home-cooked meal and networking. I wanted to provide them with a home-cooked meal since I remembered missing home-cooked meals when I was attending college.

Ironically, one of the youths had a class with another youth and they did not know each other. After getting to know each other, one youth was surprised to know that a youth she met at this event had lived with her sister in the same foster home. The “networking” became a critical component with these young

people as they began to help each other problem solve, give each other rides to and from places, and help each other link to other resources, including job opportunities.

We have had at least two “meet and greet” sessions each semester. As our commitment to the youth in college went public, we received more support from the De Kalb Field Office staff. Many began to help by also cooking or purchasing food and providing donations, gift cards, and even Easter baskets.

During the spring semester of 2010, I contacted a friend of mine who works in the Human Resource Department at Verizon Wireless. She brought a team of Verizon Human Resource staff to the “meet and greet”. They provided a presentation to our youth in care on how to prepare for a job interview and how to build an effective resume.

While these “meet and greet” sessions have been successful, we wanted to capture more youth in care who we were not aware of who are attending NIU or Kishwaukee College. We wanted to extend the support to ALL youth in college regardless of who had case responsibilities. We also wanted to make sure that transportation was not an issue as our local office is on the East side of the town. In order to do this, we needed to find a place on the NIU campus or nearby.

Mr. Echevarria was able to secure support from the NIU Center for Black Studies. Without hesitation, Derrick Smith allowed us to use their facility.

We had our first of this year’s “meet and greet” sessions at the Center. It was a “back to school” event. We were joined by Laura

Gutierrez, representing the DCFS Youth in College (YIC) program; Patricia Palmer representing DCFS Education & Training Voucher; and Deb Rempfer representing NIU Financial Aid Office or Bursar’s Office. They each presented the youth with critical information about their programs that centers around the DCFS youths in college. They also contributed to their meal. As always, we had great DCFS staff turn out at this event. We informed our youth in care that we are there for them and not to be shy, to call us for moral support or to help them find other support to make their college experience better.

Many of the youths had reported that they had a negative perception of DCFS staff. Some reported that this support has helped them change their views of Department staff and now sees them as positive support.

This has been an amazing journey and Richard Echevarria and I, as well as our supportive staff and community members, are dedicated to help ALL youths in college who are attending NIU or Kishwaukee College have as much support as we can provide.

With this support, we hope that the youths in college see the benefits of them not feeling alone, but rather supported so that they can continue their success!

If you have a Youth in College at Northern Illinois University or Kishwaukee College, or will attend any of these colleges in the near future, please encourage them to connect with either Dahlia Roman or Richard Echevarria at 815-787-5300. We will make our best effort to help them connect, network, and find support.

LAC Summer Networking Event at Fish Lake Beach

By Emely Sanchez

On August 13th, 2011 the Latino Advisory Committee (LAC) hosted a summer retention activity at Fish Lake Beach which is located in Volo, Illinois.

We barbequed, swam at the beach, did some fishing, face painted, played several games, danced, went on a hay ride and enjoyed the weather, both good and bad.

This was a great opportunity for bilingual DCFS and POS employees alike in getting to know each other and their families.

LAC plans on hosting another summer retention activity in 2012 and would like to encourage all bilingual DCFS and POS employees and their families to attend and experience all the fun we had this year!

LAC would like to thank all those employees and their families for attending this event and making it a success! Please contact Emely Sanchez via outlook if you are interested in sharing ideas and helping to plan for next year’s event.



Casa Guanajuato: A True Family Advocacy Center

By Sylvia Fonseca and Hector Vasquez

On July 20th 2011, the Latino Advisory Committee held our monthly meeting in the Moline area at the Casa Guanajuato Quad City Agency and Family Advocacy Center. Dr. Michael Woods, Executive Director shared with us some of the services they provide as a Family Advocacy Center to residents in the area. While they primarily serve the Latino Community, all residents are welcome to avail themselves of the vast variety of social services.

In collaboration with the Illinois Department of Public Health, Casa has developed an educational puppet program that spreads the word of living healthy from the inside out. Above all, as a Family Advocacy Center, Casa Guanajuato in the Quad Cities is about building bridges and instilling community responsibility and cultural pride. One project that is visible is the colorful mosaic inspired planters (formerly tin rubbish cans) that could be seen throughout the community. Dr. Woods informed the Advisory Committee that the children from their agency had begun this project and the merchants proudly displayed them in front of their establishments.

Casa Guanajuato helps to highlight the positive impact of a culturally diversified community and the contributions from the Latino community. For example, they provide care packages for children and youth entering foster care, which are made by parents in the community.

These achievements and the many other projects could not have been accomplished without the support of Latino families, children and

committed colleagues across the region via the Esperanza Network and above all from funding from the Illinois DCFS Family Advocacy Center program (Dr. Woods).

We all know that the first classroom for a child is their home. With that in mind, another beneficial program at this Family Advocacy Center is Casa

Guanajuato's AVANCE Program. It is a nine month curriculum that consists of weekly parent education classes and home visits with special topics which recognize the great importance of reading, effective discipline and a well-balanced diet.

The comprehensive Parent-Child Education Program promotes community economic development, positive parenting skills and behaviors, school readiness, parental school involvement, adult education, and civic engagement for a simultaneous impact on both the parent and child. The free program has improved the school readiness of children and has had a strong impact on Latino families through partnerships with community-based organizations. This evidence-based program model is preventative, community-based and two-generation focused. The program concentrates on parenting education, family support, early childhood development, brain development, literacy, and school readiness. The curriculum consists of weekly parent education classes with special topics which recognize the great importance of reading, effective discipline and balanced nutrition. A unique element of the



program, educational toy making, promotes teaching through play and encourages personal connections among participants. This activity reduces stress, which often impedes effective parenting, while promoting self-sufficiency to parents. Home visits, nutritious meals and transportation are other significant model components which play an integral role in the program's overall success. In addition, the AVANCE Program provides parents with the opportunity to participate in adult literacy classes which better prepare them for obtaining their General Educational Development Diploma (GED), English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, or attend college.

New Americans Initiatives

U.S. citizenship is the path to full participation in our nation. You can vote, travel freely, protect yourself and your family members from the possibility of deportation, petition to unite with other family members, hold a wider range of jobs, and have access to all of the rights, benefits, and responsibilities of a full citizen of the United States of America.

Casa Guanajuato staff are available to answer questions about:

- Who is eligible for citizenship and who is not?
- How much does it cost and how long does it take?
- Do I need to speak English? How well?
- What is on the Citizenship Test? How do I prepare?
- What are the benefits of U.S. citizenship?

Staff can assist with citizenship applications by providing:

- Citizenship workshops for application assistance and legal advice
- A checklist of the documents you must submit
- Referral to qualified attorneys, if necessary
- Referral to citizenship and English classes, if necessary
- Help with materials to prepare you for the citizenship test
- Help with financing the citizenship process.

To learn more about the requirements, benefits and process of becoming a U.S. citizen, come to one of Casa's upcoming informational sessions for free information regarding citizenship and other services their partner organizations provide.

It was rewarding to see Casa Guanajuato's accomplishments and to listen to colleagues share experiences and recommendations on improving the lives of our Latino families and community. The DCFS Latino Advisory Committee truly thanks Casa Guanajuato for their hospitality and for providing us a first hand look at grass roots social work at its best!

For more information on Casa Guanajuato you may contact the Director Dr. Michael Woods at 309-736-7727 or visit them at 525 16th Street, Moline, IL 61265.

Yo Lo Hice!/ You Can Too! Youth Career Event

By Valerie Garcia

In collaboration with The Latino Consortium, Junior Achievement of Chicago, the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, and other organizations, Northeastern Illinois University hosted students from a variety of Chicagoland high schools to participate the Yo Lo Hice, You Can Too! Career Event on March 7, 2011. The goal of this event was to inspire students to realize their own life potential. Latino professionals from a variety of careers were invited to share their own experiences on successfully navigating through the education system and how their struggles and experiences have shaped who they are today.

The morning session provided students with a keynote address from Dr. Rosita Lopez, Professor at Northern Illinois University. Dr. Lopez shared her personal experiences of growing up Latina and feeling "different" from most other students. She spoke about her role models, one being an elementary school teacher who wore Chanel No. 5 and always carried herself professionally. Her overall message was that students could achieve anything, as long as they worked hard and found passion in what they do.

Dr. Lopez's speech was followed by a "speed networking" activity where students were exposed to a variety of careers. Business and community professionals were invited to discuss their career and how their own educational attainment played a role in their lives. Presentations included an explanation of their career path, personal stories of interest, educational decisions, the joys and frustrations of the field,

and advice for students. This session was intended to help students better understand the direct relationship of our education to life skills and career opportunities in the workplace.

The afternoon session provided students with workshops that focused on activities provided by Junior Achievement of Chicago. One particular activity from the JA Economics for Success program had students apply their knowledge of decision-making, self-knowledge, and the "world of work" by playing a board game that stresses the importance of the relationship between education, work, and opportunities for success. Students also received workshops in financial literacy by participating in activities such as Keeping Your Balance where they received occupation cards and observed how different jobs provide different monthly salaries. Based on monthly salaries, students evaluated the opportunity costs of decisions to form a budget. Based on this, they compared their spending decisions to suggested amounts and overall learned the importance of spending less than what you earn.

Today, where high school dropout rates have reached 55% in Latino communities, events such as the Yo Lo Hice, You Can Too! Career Event are crucial to inspiring students to become competitive in a global economy. By identifying their own personal skills, interests, and values students learned how their choices now will affect the outcome of their future success.

Nicasa Joins the Family Advocacy Center Services Providers

By Tricia Bowdidge

Nicasa, a behavioral and social health organization, was awarded a Family Advocacy Center (FAC) contract from DCFS in May 2010.

Nicasa now offers FAC services in Round Lake, Waukegan, Highland Park and North Chicago.



Nicasa's FAC program serves families with children under the age of 18. These families may be at risk of entering DCFS or may already be working with DCFS and would benefit from additional support services. The FAC program assists clients and their families navigate the complexities of the human service arena; the program provides services such as parenting, substance use/abuse, youth and adult counseling, financial planning and so much more. Referrals are made for services elsewhere if they are not offered by Nicasa in order to connect families with needed services.

Since its inception, Nicasa's FAC program has served over 200 families. Many FAC clients were referred to the program by family, friends, neighbors or previous clients who had been helped by the program. This family and community connection helped families during difficult times. A strong desire to maintain families and, conversely, the strong desire for reunification of DCFS-involved, non-intact families, brought a focus and commitment to meeting families' current crises. Nicasa has been able to connect clients to services in such

areas as housing, financial, clothing and professional counseling.

During these difficult economic times, the immediate financial crises families are facing often bring them to Nicasa's FAC door. Many families are experiencing for the first time long-term unemployment and the issues with housing, bills, etc., that accompany this experience. Nicasa staff is able to help these families access and navigate the social service system. Some families seek services to help with a crisis of health or child behavioral issues. Nicasa's in-depth intake and service plan has helped identify comprehensive service needs and develop an action plan for each family.

All services are offered in both English and Spanish. To schedule a no-fee, initial appointment, call (847) 546-6450 and ask to schedule a Family Advocacy Assessment at a Nicasa office in your community. For more information about the FAC program and the other behavioral health services offered by Nicasa visit www.nicasa.org.

Nicasa Office Locations

Nicasa Headquarters

Counseling, Prevention, Administration
31979 N. Fish Lake Road
Round Lake, IL 60073
Phone: (847) 546-6450
Fax: (847) 546-6760

Waukegan Office

Counseling and Prevention
1113 Greenwood Ave.
Waukegan, IL 60085
Phone: (847) 244-4434
Fax: (847) 244-9431

Buffalo Grove Office

Counseling
2900 Main Street
Buffalo Grove, IL 60069
Phone: (847) 634-6422
Fax: (847) 634-6775

Highland Park Office

Counseling
1724 1st Street
Highland Park, IL 60035
Phone: (847) 433-1303
Fax: (847) 433-2324

Bridge House

Residential Program
3016 Grand Ave.
Waukegan, IL 60085
Phone: (847) 662-4124
Fax: (847) 662-4227

Judy H. Fried Center (formerly Women's Services)

Counseling and Supportive Services
2031 Dugdale Ave.
North Chicago, IL 60064
Phone: (847) 785-8660
Fax: (847) 785-8665

Birth Parent Council

I've walked a mile in your shoes and I'm here to help make your journey easier

By Sylvia Fonseca

I know the challenges that many of you frontline workers face when trying to do what is best for families while keeping children safe. I know the frustration of what appears to be impossible expectations from administration and the feeling of being buried by paperwork and SACWIS entries while promoting good social work practice. While training was invaluable as a frontline worker in both DCP and follow-up, I learned how to get through these challenges with the support of my peers and supervisors because they had once walked in my shoes and helped make my journey easier.

And so it is true with the parents who become involved in our child welfare system and are faced with what appears to be impossible expectations. Who is there to help them face the challenges of maneuvering through the child welfare system? Who knows the defensiveness, frustration, anger, sense of loss and feelings of losing control regarding their very own children?

A positive resource is the Birth Parent Council program. The Birth Parent Council holds monthly meetings that provide support to parents who are currently or previously involved with DCFS. The meetings help them face the challenges of maneuvering within the child welfare system and accepting help from our frontline workers and resources recommended to reunify their families. The meetings also allow them to speak frankly and openly about their experiences. The parents can have current open



cases or closed cases; those with previous involvement bring hope to the newly involved parents and provide valuable feedback about service provision. They can say to their peers, "I've walked a mile in your shoes and I'm here to help make your journey easier."

I am encouraging you to tell your parents about the Birth Parent Council to get them involved with this positive support and mentoring group. The Birth Parent Council is another valuable tool to reinforce to parents that we are here to help the families and children we serve. The program is currently working to ensure that language is not a barrier to participation. For more information and to obtain brochures that are in Spanish feel free to contact Donnella Bishop or Marsha Harris at 773-371-6000.

Dia de los Muertos Ofrenda

By: Evelyn Martinez

Dia de los Muertos, November 2nd, is a tradition of celebrating or honoring our loved ones who have passed on to another life after death. The holiday is recognized not only in Mexico but several other Latin American countries. Death is seen as the next part of a journey, an extension of life. We celebrate the deceased in many different ways: Families create altars at home, parades, and picnics at the cemetery where gravesites have been decorated. This holiday is not necessarily a sad event but rather one of celebration of the life of the individual who has passed. This is communicated in many homes by making an ofrenda (altar) that may contain pictures, belongings and favorite things pertaining to that person who is being remembered.

This year, our annual Latino Family Institute will begin on Thursday, November 17 and the Latino Advisory Committee will sponsor a simple but meaningful ofrenda at the conference site to commemorate this event. We invite everyone who attends to participate by bringing a framed picture of a loved one to display on or around the altar. The altar will be located in the exhibits area at the hotel site. Those who are not able to display pictures will still be able to participate by writing their loved one's name on a colorful piece of paper and placing it on the ofrenda. Together we will be able to redeem and reclaim our past that helps to keep the spirit of tradition and our culture alive. Thank you to everyone for your participation and helping make this a beautiful display.

Upcoming Latino Events

The Office of Latino Services/Office of Affirmative Action invites you to volunteer and represent your agency! For more information, please contact Jose Lopez at 312-808-5298 or Jose.J.Lopez@illinois.gov.

DATE/TIME	EVENT	LOCATION	ORGANIZER/ CONTACT
November 17-18 8:30 a.m.	23rd Annual Latino Family Institute Day	Wyndham Lisle- Chicago Hotel, Lisle	Illinois Dept. of Children and Family Services
November 18 9 a.m.	9th Annual ILLCF Conference	Stephens Convention Center, Rosemont	Illinois Latino Legislative Caucus Foundation

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:

Evelyn Martinez
LAC Newsletter Chairperson
DCFS
8100 N. McCormick
Skokie, Illinois 60076
Evelyn.Martinez@illinois.gov

If you would like more information or would like to participate in one of the LAC subcommittees, contact Luis Carrion at Luis.Carrion@illinois.gov.



Latino Advisory Committee

Special thanks to the Newsletter Committee Members:

Evelyn Martinez - Chairperson, Carol Kline - Editor, Madeline Gonzalez-Garcia, Syliva Fonseca, Maria Calderon, Carmen Alvarez, and Julia Camacho de Monzon

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